

DN disabilitynow

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Flight victory in sight

DN CAMPAIGN



BY PRIYA KOTECHA

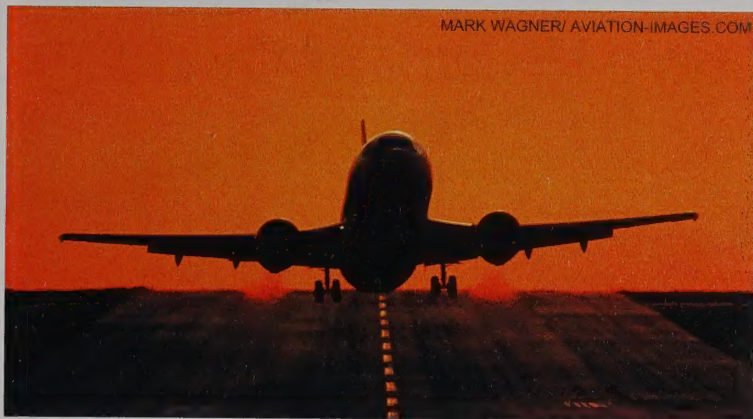
Disabled people put off flying for fear of broken equipment and poor treatment have praised DN for helping secure new laws aimed at ensuring better services.

DN's Flight Rights campaign was applauded for its part in the move after European Union (EU) legislation* was approved in the European Parliament before Christmas.

Launched in 2002, our campaign called on airlines to handle wheelchairs and mobility equipment with greater care and pay compensation for breakages.

Under the new laws, disabled travellers will be entitled to compensation if their equipment is damaged.

Actor Luke Hamill, whose own wheelchair has been smashed in transit, believes



MARK WAGNER/ AVIATION-IMAGES.COM

Lift off: After five years, the future looks bright for disabled flyers

DN's campaign has been responsible for putting the issue on the EU agenda. He said people would be encouraged to fly again.

"This law provides a level of insurance," he said. "The Flight Rights campaign has done really well to get that."

Athlete Dame Tanni Grey Thompson echoed his views, saying: "DN's Flight Rights campaign has helped a lot,

because disabled people themselves have realised that they shouldn't be treated like that. It's a victory for the campaign in getting the issue recognised."

The legislation was also welcomed by access consultant Phil Friend, who helped launch the campaign. But he warned: "I am still concerned that compensation must reflect cost to the loser, including loss of earnings if the person is having their chair

repaired and can't get to work."

The European Commission is currently deciding who should be responsible for paying for damage and how compensation should be calculated.

The new EU laws will also mean that, from April 2007, disabled passengers cannot be refused carriage on the grounds of their disability or lack of mobility "except for justified safety reasons in accordance with international, community or national law".

The rest of the legislation, which will sit side-by-side with the UK's voluntary code of practice for air travel, will come into effect by April 2008, making it illegal for airlines or airports to levy a charge for wheelchair assistance.

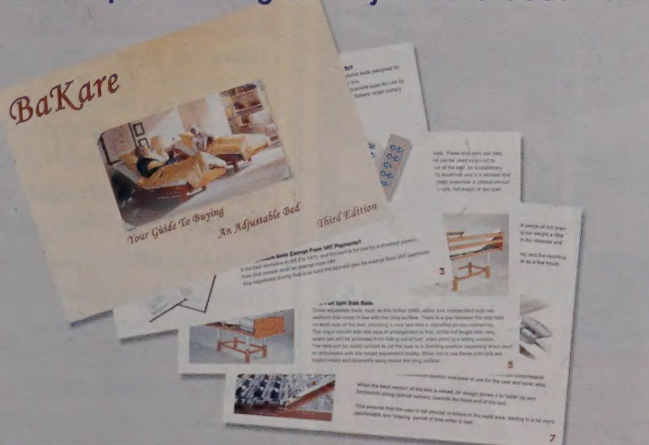
** Rights of disabled people and persons of restricted mobility when travelling by air, tel: 020 7944 8300, www.publications.dft.gov.uk*

CAMPAIGN IN BRIEF

- August 2002**
DN launches Flight Rights campaign
- March 2003**
Department for Transport publishes voluntary code to make air travel more user-friendly for disabled people
- March 2004**
DN reports on the "limited success" of the voluntary code after complaints from readers
- March 2005**
European Commission proposes new regulation on air travel for disabled passengers
- December 2005**
EU regulation passed – includes compensation for travellers who have wheelchairs damaged
- April 2008**
Regulation to come into full effect



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Sex offender loophole warning

Sex offenders have probably slipped through loopholes in the protection system and are working with vulnerable adults, experts have warned.

Fears were raised in the wake of huge publicity generated by the row over sex offenders who have been given jobs in schools.

Rebecca Seden, policy and campaigns officer for the learning difficulty charities Voice UK, Respond and the Ann Craft Trust, said it was "very likely" that sex offenders had found work with vulnerable adults.

Meanwhile, a Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report has found "serious concerns" over the number of homes for disabled adults and older people that failed to carry out proper recruitment checks on their staff. The report* says many services also had inadequate adult protection policies.

The government plans to tighten pre-recruitment checks on staff applying to work with vulnerable adults through a



new "vetting and barring" scheme in a Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups bill to be published this month.

The bill will allow disabled people receiving direct payments to check through their local authority whether a prospective employee is barred from working with vulnerable adults. Staff working in day centres will also be covered.

The two existing lists of people barred from working with children will be combined and there will be a separate list of those barred from working with vulnerable adults.

But following Education Secretary Ruth Kelly's (above) explanation of how the bill

would overhaul vetting and barring procedures, Ms Seden said there were "huge concerns" that the government was focusing on children at the expense of vulnerable adults.

She said: "Why do we have to wait for similar cases, as have happened with schools, to get the government to turn its attention to vulnerable adults?"

The three charities want the vulnerable adults list combined with the children's list.

Joan Humble MP, chair of the all-party group on social care, said: "There are many adults who are just as vulnerable as children and need exactly the same sort of protection." She said she would be "looking very carefully" at the new bill.

James Churchill, chief executive of the Association for Real Change, shared the CSCI's concerns but said some homes had previously faced severe delays in securing Criminal Records Bureau checks.

* See page five

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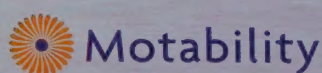
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U-turn on Sativex

BY DN REPORTERS

The Home Office has performed a dramatic U-turn, by signalling that disabled people with conditions other than multiple sclerosis (MS) could apply for permission to import the cannabis-based medicine Sativex.

The Home Office had previously told DN that only people with MS would be able to apply, through their doctors, to import the drug from Canada - a decision that would have turned UK drugs policy on its head.

But the Home Office has now signalled that people with conditions such as arthritis or cancer pain can also apply to obtain the drug through a licensed importer. This importer will probably be the drug's producer, GW Pharmaceuticals (GWP).

GWP would still need permission from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to import Sativex for people with those conditions. If the MHRA had no objection, the Home Office would need to grant its own license to the importer. But it says it would only refuse a license if it had concerns about the doctor, the importer or the patient.

A Home Office spokeswoman said: "Our only interest is in preventing controlled drugs leaking on to the illicit market."

Last month, the Home Office told DN it would not even consider applications to import the drug from people with conditions other than MS.

GWP said it had received "hundreds and hundreds" of

enquiries from doctors and people with MS*.

As we went to press, home secretary Charles Clarke announced that cannabis would remain a class C drug, deciding not to overturn the decision made by David Blunkett two years ago.

Also, a new Royal College of Physicians report** has suggested that cannabis-based medicines could offer future treatments for pain, cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis.

**Disabled people seeking information about Sativex should ask their GP to contact GWP, tel: 01980 557000,*

www.gwpfarm.co.uk

***Potential health benefits and risks of cannabis and cannabis-based medicines, tel: 020 7935 1174, www.rcplondon.ac.uk*



Speaking out: Disabled Londoner Nancy Maguire, 19, a representative of global charity Save the Children, addresses the United Nations in New York about her concerns that young people have been left out of a draft UN convention on the rights of disabled people. This month's DN profile of Richard Light (see page 22) who represents UK disability groups in the discussions, outlines the ins and outs of the convention, due to be ratified next year.

Hope for workers

Disabled workers at a factory earmarked for closure in Croydon could be saved from redundancy thanks to a workers' union.

The jobs of 78 disabled workers at Crosfield, a council-supported factory, are on the line after Croydon council decided last month that it could not afford to keep the business afloat.

But the GMB Union, which has campaigned to save the factory from closure, said it would

put together a "viable business plan" to help save Crosfield.

Gerry Carr, resource and policy officer for GMB, said: "We think that Crosfield can be saved, albeit in a modified form."

Speaking after the decision was announced, council leader Tony Newman, said: "I am satisfied that the council has no viable alternative to closure."

According to council figures, Crosfield recorded a £1.6 million deficit in 2004/5.

Prison for vote thieves

Anyone who attempts to stop a disabled person voting in a public election could face up to five years behind bars, under the Electoral Administration Bill*, which is due to go through the House of Lords early this month.

Ruth Scott, campaigns manager for the disability charity Scope, welcomed the development and said it would help prevent service managers and care workers from blocking a disabled person's vote.

Ms Scott said carers or household members often wrongly assumed that a disabled person did not understand the electoral process. Some carers even use the disabled person's ballot to vote twice.

She added: "(The bill) is positive because it recognises that electoral fraud is much more problematic than was thought."

Scope is pushing to remove a clause from the bill that would allow election officials to deprive a disabled person of their vote if

they thought they did not have sufficient "mental capacity".

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Department for Constitutional Affairs admitted the government did not have figures to show how many disabled people vote, or are registered to vote, even though they keep figures for other minority groups.

**For more information tel: 020 7210 8614, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmbills/090/2006090.htm*

Euthanasia report out

Doctors ended the lives of an estimated 2,800 patients through euthanasia in 2004, a new report has revealed.

Following an anonymous survey of 857 doctors on their decisions when faced with terminally ill patients, carried out by Brunel University, it was estimated that 936 UK deaths were deemed "voluntary euthanasia", where the patient asks the doctor to end their life.

Another 1,930 were due to doctors "ending life without an explicit request from the patient". Both are illegal under British law.

About 175,000 deaths were due to "withholding or withdrawing treatment", which is legal, with about 190,000 triggered by doctors legally alleviating symptoms with possible life-shortening effects.

**To view statistics, visit www.brunel.ac.uk/news/press-office/cdata/euthanasia*

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Council's free home care

BY PRIYA KOTACHA

Disabled residents of a London borough should no longer have to pay for home care, as their council prepares to abolish charges from next month.

The move has been welcomed by campaigners, who have called on other local authorities to follow its lead.

If the decision is rubber-stamped by the full council later this month, 800 disabled and older people in Hammersmith and Fulham (HAF), who currently have to pay up to £158 for 20 hours of care per week, will get free help with shopping, personal care and cleaning.

HAF is one of the first councils in the country to abolish charges - Derby City Council abolished its charges in October.

It comes just weeks after campaigners in Surrey protested at their council's charging policies, which they said left

many disabled people without enough money to live on.

An HAF spokesman said the money would come from extra central government funding and savings of £8.1 million in the current financial year.

He said it would not have to cut costs elsewhere in its social care budget.

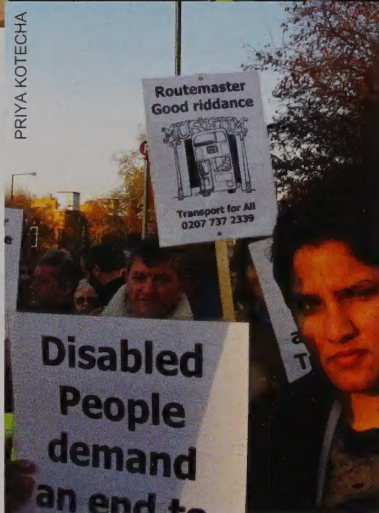
Stephen Burke, leader of the Labour-run council, said: "With an extra £5 million from the government this year and another rise planned for next year, together with substantial efficiency savings, we now feel we can propose a long-term commitment to a free service again."

Menghi Mulchandani, co-chair of the National Centre for Independent Living, said: "We think it's excellent news."

"It finally takes away an extra tax that disabled people have to pay and we hope that other local authorities will take note and do the same."



End of the road: Disability rights campaigners make their views known as the capital's last inaccessible Routemaster bus - apart from "heritage" routes - pulls into Brixton bus garage at the end of its final journey, in December. The protest, organised by Transport for All, turned sour as several non-disabled Routemaster fans threw verbal abuse at disability campaigners and tore up their leaflets.



In brief

Die at home wishes

Most terminally ill patients want to die at home, but too often this wish cannot be granted, according to a new NHS Confederation report.

The confederation, which represents NHS organisations, says end-of-life care must improve.

It highlights a survey by the National Council for Palliative Care, which found that more than half of patients would prefer to die at home, but only one in five were able to do so.

The Confederation called on the government to use its forthcoming White Paper on out-of-hospital care to improve palliative care.

Footie frustration

Wheelchair-using England football fans will receive less than ten tickets for each of the team's three group games at this summer's World Cup in Germany.

The allocation was originally just three per game, but was increased to between six and nine after pressure from the Football Association and the National Association of Disabled Supporters (NADS).

NADS said it was frustrated at the allocation and the difficulty of obtaining other access information from the German organisers.

College fails test

A residential college run by the charity Scope has failed to comply with disability discrimination laws, according to an OFSTED inspection.

Inspectors at Beaumont College in Lancashire found classrooms and residential accommodation were unsatisfactory and the college had failed to provide value for money, although teaching was good, with support and guidance being "outstanding".

Scope said it intended to deal with the access issues but was pleased with most aspects of the report.

Wait is too long

Cancer patients are having to wait too long to see a specialist and many are not given vital information about their condition, according to MPs.

A Committee of Public Accounts report says treatment of people with cancer is "not as good as it could be", although it had improved since 2000. The report also says prostate cancer is seen as a lower priority than other common cancers.

Motability slammed for 'absolute incompetence'

The UK's leading car scheme for disabled people has been blasted for "absolute incompetence" and forced to apologise after giving out incorrect information on its helpline.

John Greenwood, who had been car shopping for his dis-

abled wife, was outraged after a Motability "senior coach" gave him advice that conflicted with guidelines set out by the Inland Revenue (IR).

Mr Greenwood, from Bolton, was wrongly advised that he would have to pay the

17.5 per cent VAT on the purchase price of an adapted vehicle - a mistake which could have cost him around £2,550.

Mr Greenwood said: "People put a great deal of credence into what an organisation like Motability says. They don't have

to give out information, but if they do, it should be accurate."

Motability senior coach, Koray Koraca, admitted he and colleagues had got it wrong in the case of Mr Greenwood and said future similar calls would be referred to the IR.

London access seen in terms of ramps and loos

London's cultural institutions must still do more to improve access, according to research by a disability arts organisation.

Mayor of London Ken Livingstone said the report* by Shape Arts would "inform policy-making around disability issues in the arts and help us create a more inclusive capital".

The research, commissioned by the Mayor, involved 45 organisations in sport, heritage and the arts.

The report says that access issues for disabled people are still often seen in terms of physical "ramps and toilets" and ignore access for people with learning difficulties and sensory impairments.

When asked to name their most significant access challenges, most organisations mentioned physical features first.

Barriers for people with learning difficulties include

complex language in information leaflets and signs that just use text and no graphics.

Steve Mannix, chief executive of Shape, described the findings as a "mixed bag", but said it "was to be expected" and "allows us to demonstrate models of best practice to those less aware".

He added: "This will therefore be a vital tool for Shape in delivering Open the Door, our own disability access agenda."

He praised the commitment by the Mayor and Greater London Authority to access issues and said the report would be "the foundation of true access to culture for deaf and disabled people across London".

* *The Mayor of London's Disability and Culture Research*, free from tel: 020 7983 4100 or visit www.shapearts.org.uk or www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/culture.jsp

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Poverty shame

BY JOHN PRING

DN CAMPAIGN



Ann Pitchforth, from Pontypool, who has multiple sclerosis, saying: "Ann has had to go without food to keep warm. How can New Labour justify that situation?"

The debate came as Chancellor Gordon Brown announced details of an extra £300 million of new measures to help pensioners through the cold weather.

Meanwhile, DN has obtained further strong evidence that suggests disabled people die every winter because they cannot afford to heat their homes.

The figures – compiled from answers to a parliamentary question asked by Labour MP Roger Berry – estimate how many severely disabled people stopped receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) after dying during winter months.

They show that an average of 4,940 people on higher rates of DLA died during the winter from 2001 to 2005, compared with less than 4,600 during warmer months.

This figure of more than 300 "excess winter deaths" backs up similar figures on Incapacity Benefit published in last month's DN.

And research by Capability Scotland has found that more than two in five disabled people and families with disabled children spend at least ten per cent of their income on heating and lighting. Nearly a quarter of those surveyed spend at least 20 per cent of their income on fuel.

The charity said the figures revealed the "true, shocking extent of fuel poverty among disabled people".

Welsh politicians have tried to shame the government into extending winter fuel payments to severely disabled people.

During a Welsh Assembly debate on fuel poverty last month, Plaid Cymru's shadow social justice minister Leanne Wood said the UK government should provide disabled people with the same protection from the cold as older people.

She said: "If the government accepts the principle that pensioners, as a vulnerable group, need additional help in the winter, surely that principle must be applied to other vulnerable groups."

She mentioned the case of



Fighting fit: Disabled former boxing world champion Michael Watson (left) helps Stephen Cunningham, World Blind Speed Champion, relaunch Rushcliffe Arena in Nottingham, the 100th gym to be accredited under the Inclusive Fitness Initiative.

Care failings

Social care services across the UK are battling to meet people's needs, a report* by an independent care watchdog has found.

In the first comprehensive report on social care in England, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) said funding pressures and a tightening of thresholds had left many people without services.

The report said support was "urgently needed" for the five million unpaid carers the system relied on and it concluded that more should be done to involve people in their own assessment and care planning, especially those with mental ill health.

The report also found that councils were reporting "constant pressure" on their budgets, as demand for care services and costs continued to rise.

* *The state of social care in England 2004-05*, tel: 0845 015 0120, www.csci.org.uk

School backtrack would harm kids

To backtrack on inclusive education would harm the development of disabled children, Disability Rights Commission (DRC) education experts have told MPs.

Commissioner Phillipa Russell told the Education and Skills Committee's Special Educational Needs (SEN) inquiry that she recognised the concerns about inclusive education raised by Baroness Warnock last summer. But she said she still believed inclusive education should remain the long-term goal.

When pressed about whether a mainstream setting was appropriate for children with the most complex needs, Dr Russell said: "Parents pick special schools because they don't have confidence that mainstream schools will meet the needs of their children."

She added: "Until we've discovered all the ways to include all pupils, there will be a place for special schools."

Steve Haines, DRC policy manager for education and employment, said disabled children were often excluded from a

range of school activities because of over-zealous risk management. He said they should be given the chance to interact with non-disabled peers, which would help with the transition from school to work.

All three DRC experts expressed concerns about proposals in the Education white paper to give schools more independence and how this would affect disabled students.

Dr Russell said she hoped schools would be given incentives to help towards fully meeting the needs of disabled pupils.

Talking newspaper threat

The UK's only national talking newspaper service for blind and partially sighted people is in danger of closing, due to a lack of funds.

National Talking Newspapers and Magazines, a charity that transfers more than 230 titles to audio tape and CD, said it lost up to a third of its donation income last year.

Spokeswoman Brenda

Hatcher said that a third of production costs were covered by subscriptions, but the charity relied on donations to keep the £1m operation running.

She said global disasters such as the Pakistan earthquake and Asian tsunami were drawing public donations away from smaller charities. "If we close... it would be disastrous. We are a lifeline."

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Honoured

BY JOHN PRING

Two disabled women who have battled for disability rights have been rewarded with OBEs in the New Year honours.

Susan Daniels, chief executive of The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), was recognised for services to disabled children.

Under Ms Daniels, who is deaf, the NDCS has become the world's largest childhood deafness charity. She said the award was a "wonderful surprise".

An OBE was also awarded to Sally Witcher, the first chair of the Disability Employment Advisory Committee, which works with the government on employment issues.

Autistic artist Stephen Wiltshire (pictured) was awarded an MBE for services to art.

His sister, Annette, said the family was "gobsmacked" by the news although Stephen "took the news with not much interest".

She added: "If it was a Cadillac then there would have been a different response, although saying that he looked at me with a smile and said, 'Yeah, great.'"

Frank Allen, a founder of Llanelli Disabled Access



Group, received an MBE. The group has overseen a series of access campaign successes. Mr Allen, a wheelchair user, said he was "flabbergasted", but added: "It was the access group's triumph."

Bert Dyson, secretary of the Helsby Golf Club Powered Wheelchair Appeal, was awarded an MBE. He launched the appeal in 1983, after retiring early following a stroke. It has paid for more than 200 wheelchairs for disabled children.

Alan Stacey, who has helped run The 2000 Club in Hounslow, Middlesex, for more than 20 years, was awarded an MBE. The club provides sports

and social activities for disabled people.

An MBE was also awarded to Meg Muggridge, a founder of Chatterbox – Norfolk's first Talking Newspaper – in Norwich.

Patricia Molloy, from Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, was awarded an MBE, after providing respite care to disabled children for 20 years.

Edna Ainge was awarded an MBE for services to disabled people on the Isle of Man. Mrs Ainge, a wheelchair user, has chaired Manx Mencap for nearly 20 years and has a daughter with Down's syndrome.

• Sports honours, page 12

Building reg questions as woman blocked from her own benefits appeal

A disabled woman attending an appeal against the withdrawal of disability benefits found her wheelchair didn't fit into the lift of a new, "accessible" government building.

Katy Lockwood, from Ely, had to wait for her wheelchair – which is larger than most models – to be dismantled so it could be fitted into the lift at the building in Cambridge.

She then had to wait while it was dismantled a second time, because the doorway of the room where the hearing was taking place was too narrow.

Miss Lockwood said: "They claim this building is completely wheelchair accessible. I was stressed. Everybody was staring because we had this big fuss about me getting out of the wheelchair."

An Appeals Service spokeswoman said the building met the good practice access provisions of Part M of the building regulations.

She said: "Every effort was made to assist the customer in this unfortunate circumstance, and an alternative venue was offered. We have apologised for



the inconvenience caused."

Andrew Shipley, policy manager for the Disability Rights Commission, said a Disability Discrimination Act case would probably fail if the lift and doorway complied with Part M.

A spokesman for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which is responsible for planning issues, said they had "not been inundated" with people unable to fit wheelchairs through doorways.

He said wheelchair manufacturers had been involved in consultations on Part M, but the government would review the regulations, now part of its Sustainable Homes Strategy, if needed.

Direct payments increase

The number of people taking up direct payments has increased by more than 60 per cent in the last year, according to draft figures released by the Health and Social Care Information Centre.

The national summary* shows an estimated 24,500 adults aged 18 and over received direct payments in 2004/2005, increasing from

15,100 in the previous year.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said: "The government has taken a number of steps to promote direct payments, including the £9m Direct Payments Development Fund."

* Community Care Statistics 2004-05, tel: 0845 300 6016, www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/commcare05adultengsum

Motoring merger finalised

The country's two largest disabled drivers' charities finally completed their long-awaited merger in December.

The merger between the Disabled Drivers' Association and the Disabled Drivers' Motor Club, first discussed 40 years ago, means that 30,000 members will now be united in a single campaigning organisation.

Pamela Morrissey, chief executive of Mobilise – the working title of the new charity – said structures for the new charity were still being put in place. Members will help to choose its new name.

She said: "We are the voice of disabled people and we need to continue to campaign on their behalf in future."

"There is a lot of work to do but I am looking forward to the challenge."

When asked if there would be any job losses or where the



Pamela Morrissey: said there was "a lot of work to do"

new charity would be based, she said that "nothing had been decided".



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IB tough talk

BY JOHN PRING

Campaigners fear the government's new Incapacity Benefit (IB) regime could be tougher than earlier proposals for reform.

The government was due to publish its green paper on welfare reform as *DN* went to press, after months of delays.

Margaret Hodge, welfare reform minister, told a Disability Rights Commission (DRC) briefing that the government wanted to cut the number of people on IB by one million in order to meet its target of 80 per cent of working age people in jobs.

She said: "There is a massive disparity in opportunity which we need to address."

Lorna Reith, chief executive of Disability Alliance, said the disability movement had welcomed proposals to increase levels of IB in the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) five-year plan.

She said this would provide a basis for disabled people to "remain included in society" and look for jobs.

But after the briefing, she said she was concerned that Mrs Hodge was sounding "toughish" and had seemed to hint that the green paper's proposals would be more severe

than the five-year plan.

Marilyn Howard, a DRC policy manager, told the briefing that the green paper would give the DWP the ideal opportunity to put the new duties of the Disability Discrimination Act into practice, by carrying out a "prototype" disability equality assessment of its proposals.

Disability Agenda Scotland, an alliance of Scottish disability organisations, warned that cutting IB "could push disabled people and their families further into poverty", and called for "a more flexible benefits system that is responsive to individual needs".

DDA charter for unions

A landmark charter committing trade unions to higher standards of disability equality will be finalised this month.

The charter, developed by the Trade Union Disability Alliance (TUDA), aims to make trade unions more aware of their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and to help them support disabled members within the workplace.

TUDA co-chair Ju Gosling, who won an access case against

the National Union of Journalists in 2004, said: "I think it's difficult for unions to tackle an employer if they don't properly address the issues themselves."

The draft charter has been circulated to all Trades Union Congress (TUC) affiliated unions and Ms Gosling said the charter has received positive feedback, though it is still too early to confirm which unions are likely to sign up.

She added: "We feel that,

with around 50 per cent of disabled people being unemployed, and the government's strategy to bring more disabled people back into work, trade unions' support for disability equality is more crucial than ever."

The charter will be officially launched at the TUC disabled members' conference in May.

* To review the charter, see www.tuda.org.uk/charter.htm or write to BM TUDA, London WC1N 3XX

Petrol station blunder prompts training pledge



Filling station giant Esso has pledged to improve staff training after a disabled motorist told how a cashier refused to help her fill her car with petrol.

Sandy Eifion-Jones, a wheelchair user from Hampton, Surrey, pulled up at the station near Hampton Court Palace a few days before Christmas.

Her teenage daughter asked the cashier three times if he would fill the car up, but he refused each time because he was working alone.

Ms Eifion-Jones said it was the first time she had ever been refused service at a petrol station. "Usually my daughter pops in and says: 'My mum is disabled, can you come out and give her a hand?' He could have locked up the shop if he was

alone but he point-blank refused and was really quite abrupt."

She was forced to drive off and find another petrol station. "I was absolutely appalled," she said. "I have never suffered anything like this before. This is a major company. They should have staff training in place."

After *DN* brought the incident to Esso's attention, the company contacted Ms Eifion-Jones to apologise, and promised to improve disability policies and staff training. She praised their response.

An Esso spokesman said staff working alone in service stations in such situations should turn off the other pumps and then assist the disabled driver.

Cameron: disability will become central to new Tory agenda

The new Conservative leader has pledged to bring disability issues into the "mainstream" of the party's policy discussions.

David Cameron (*right*), who has a severely disabled son, told Jeremy Hunt, his new shadow minister for disabled people, that he had "the most important job of all".

Mr Hunt, MP for South West Surrey, said: "The whole issue of disability is very close to his heart and I know he will have a personal interest in what I am doing which I think is very, very significant for the whole disability agenda."

"The question of disability has to move into the mainstream of society. We want the Conservatives to be in the vanguard of encouraging and promoting that change."

Mr Hunt said he wanted to focus at first on the needs of



parents of disabled children and the role of carers.

He said the poverty faced by disabled people was also "one of the many areas I will be looking at carefully".

And he said he wanted to find ways to simplify the benefits system for disabled people and ensure such benefits were better targeted.



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Libraries merge

Blind and partially sighted people can look forward to a wider collection of reading materials in large print and Braille formats, after two leading charities announced a proposed merger of their library services.

The Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) and the National Library for the Blind (NLB) began formal discussions

last month with a view to merging their library services in April 2007.

It is hoped the merger will give blind and partially sighted bookworms a wider choice of titles and formats and reduce duplication so that "more resources can be channelled into direct services for customers."



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Growing pains

BY JOHN PRING

A special school placed a gardener with learning difficulties on paid leave for two years after she made a mistake pruning the roses.

Melissa Wade faced disciplinary proceedings after only six weeks in her job at Trinity School in Dagenham, an employment tribunal heard.

She was then placed on "gardening leave" while waiting for the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham to find her a new job.

The tribunal found the school had breached its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and suggested it pay Ms Wade £12,000 compensation.

Headteacher Helena Hardie and other staff at the school had failed to support Ms Wade or apply the council's policies on disabled employees, the tribunal found.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC), which funded her legal case, said the school should have provided Ms Wade with clear, written



Gardening leave: Ms Wade spent two years on paid leave

instructions and adequate supervision.

Ms Wade said the experience had been "very upsetting and stressful".

She added: "It was not right to treat me in the way I was treated and I call upon the borough to review its policies and then make sure it adheres to them."

Bert Massie, chairman of the DRC, said: "It's shocking that a school that caters for disabled children quite singularly failed to understand the needs of a disabled employee."

A council spokesman said it would "review policies, procedures and practice" and would be "carefully considering the detail of the judgement".

Lotto millions to benefit kids



Winning line-up: Beneficiaries of the cash will include children like these young carers, on an activity day run by Kids last summer

Two charities have been awarded nearly £2.5million in Lottery cash to boost sports and leisure opportunities for disabled children and young people.

The charity Kids will be given more than £1.4million by the Big Lottery Young People's Fund to set up a Young People's Inclusion Network (YP-in).

The network will allow young disabled people in England to assess inclusion in recreation and leisure activities in their own regions, with an interactive website sharing their ideas and good practice.

YP-in will also draw up guidelines for inclusive recreation and sport during the

three-year project. They will be launched at a national conference.

Joanna Ryam, Kids' national development director, said: "Three years from now we want to ensure that no leisure provider – private, statutory or voluntary – will be able to say that they don't know how to make sure young disabled people can enjoy their programmes and facilities."

The Young People's Fund also awarded nearly £900,000 to British Blind Sport (BBS) to develop a regional sports programme for young visually impaired people from the ages of 11 to 25.

93% of calls answered after helpline shake up

The number of calls about disability living allowance and attendance allowance answered by government helplines has risen significantly, after earlier figures showed nearly four in five calls were not getting through.

A government answer to a Liberal Democrat parliamentary question showed that from January 2003 to July 2005 more than 119 million calls – one third of the total – to all government helplines and call centres met with an engaged tone, were abandoned or went unrecorded by the system.

The worst departmental offender was the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

But the DWP said it had now put in place "more lines, equipment and trained agents to meet customer demands".

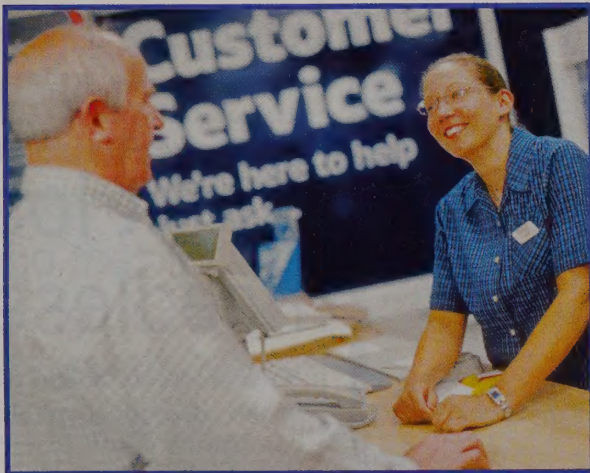
As a consequence, it said its figures had improved.

A DWP spokeswoman said: "Current figures show that 93 per cent of all calls to this line are answered. The industry standard is 90 per cent."

A Liberal Democrats spokesman said: "It was horrendous, but things have improved since then."

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Urgent probe as trust 'blocks care'

DN EXCLUSIVE BY JOHN PRING

The Health Service Ombudsman for England is conducting an urgent investigation into the case of a seriously ill disabled woman who claims a primary care trust is blocking her treatment.

Gillian McCarthy claims South Somerset Primary Care Trust (SSPCT) is refusing to treat her Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and other serious conditions.

She said the trust "constantly moves the goalposts" to avoid providing her with even her most basic needs, such as filtered water and supplies of oxygen, which she needs if she has an attack caused by chemical exposure.

For most of the last seven years she has received little or no treatment.

Ms McCarthy was exposed to heavy doses of dangerous chemicals while working in the agrochemical industry during the 1970s. She has been living in an unheated wooden hut in a Somerset field for nine years while she waits for her council to build her a safe, chemical-free home. She has no running water and no toilet facilities.



Ignored: Gillian McCarthy has gone without for nearly seven years

Ms McCarthy and many of her supporters think the trust is waiting for her to die.

She said: "They wouldn't have got away with treating a criminal like this. I feel like I have been raped. I just don't know how these people can live with themselves."

Professor Malcolm Hooper, emeritus professor of medicinal chemistry at the University of Sunderland and a leading expert on MCS, ME and Gulf War syndrome, said the

health establishment often blocks treatment and support for people with MCS because of its cost.

He said the trust's treatment of "a very sick person" had been "shameful".

"The evidence of her illness is not being believed and she has just been abandoned. They just want shot of her."

A SSPCT spokesman said: "It would not be appropriate to comment because an investigation is ongoing."

Register bonus

GPs will be paid bonuses if they set up registers of patients with learning difficulties, under a new agreement between doctors' leaders and the NHS.

The deal provides GP practices with incentive payments for providing a range of new or improved services, such as palliative care.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) welcomed the agreement, but warned that "keeping a list is not enough".

DRC research has found that people with learning difficulties are more likely than non-disabled people to have some serious conditions, but were less

likely to be given screening or routine checks.

Liz Sayce, the DRC's director of policy and communications, said: "We would like to see patients with learning disabilities being proactively offered health checks to deal with significant health problems."

A spokesman for the Department of Health said it would decide what to do with the register once it was set up.

He said: "It will give GPs a better understanding of how many patients with learning disabilities they are treating, and lay the foundations for excellent care in the future."

Specialist services at risk

Plans to revamp continence and stoma care provision* could leave disabled people with a reduced quality of service, specialist groups have warned.

New Department of Health (DH) proposals, which aim to "secure value for money for the NHS", have sparked fears that more personalised service providers will be put at risk of going out of business.

The DH has proposed a new code of practice, which will include a more transparent reimbursement system, with a 15 per cent reduction in payment for home-fitting services and allow products to be sold directly to patients through pharmacies.

But Celia Waters, general manager of the Colostomy

Association, said pharmacists are not likely to have the same level of expertise as smaller service providers.

Ms Waters said: "Our main concern is whether patient choice will be affected. If they cut costs, it's going to squeeze out smaller companies."

A DH spokeswoman said patient care was the "key objective" but could not comment on specific concerns until the consultation closed, which was due shortly after DN went to press.

*Arrangements for the provision of dressings, incontinence appliances, stoma appliances, chemical reagents and other appliances to primary and secondary care, tel: 020 7210 4850, www.dh.gov.uk/Consultations/fs/en

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The RNIB called on the government to launch an awareness campaign. But the Department of Health said the government reintroduced free sight tests for people 60 years and over in 1999 and had worked on an RNIB awareness campaign which "was not as successful as we would have hoped".

*Open Your Eyes, £5, from RNIB customer services, tel: 0845 702 3153, www.rnib.org.uk

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Motability

Commonwealth concern

EXCLUSIVE BY PRIYA KOTECHA

Disabled sports stars have raised concerns about the limited number of disability events on offer at next month's Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia.

The sporting programme for Elite Athletes with a Disability (EAD) offers just four sports – swimming, athletics, table tennis and weightlifting – compared with 12 individual and four

team sports that will be contested by non-disabled athletes during the ten days of competition.

There is also disappointment at the lack of races on offer in each sport and how they will be contested.

Disabled swimmers will not be able to race against competitors with similar impairments. Instead, the winner of each event will be the swimmer who performs best against the world record for their class. This could

mean the swimmer coming last winning gold. One swimmer, who asked not to be named, said this would confuse the crowd and not help to raise the profile of disability sport.

The swimmer said the EAD programme had not developed since the last games in Manchester in 2002, which introduced the idea of integrating disabled athletes among non-disabled athletes.

The swimmer said: "I would

have loved to go, but at the same time I wouldn't want to compete under those conditions."

In track and field, only six gold medals are up for grabs, with no wheelchair races on offer for disabled male athletes.

Track athlete Shelly Woods, who will represent England in the T54 800m wheelchair race, said: "There should be more events and more selection. You don't get the same kind of crowd at a disabled European

event as you do at a non-disabled event. That's why I'm looking forward to racing."

Gerwyn Owen, from the Federation of Disability Sport Wales, said: "We are disappointed, but we must remember that disability sport has come a long way. At least this way disabled sport is being shown to a wider audience. If we have a separate Commonwealth event for disabled athletes, not everybody will watch it."

Long celebrates New Year honour

Paralympic swimmer Giles Long (*right*) was one of four disabled sports figures to be awarded an MBE in the New Year honours.

The 29 year old from Barnet, who played a crucial role in London's bid to stage the Paralympic and Olympic Games in 2012, said news of the award had "not yet sunk in".

"It's a funny thing," he said, "I'm a Paralympic swimmer because I love swimming and competing, but to have people looking on from outside the sport and recognising your achievements is very special."

Long, who has been in the



sport for 12 years, claimed his seventh Paralympic medal in Athens.

Paralympic cyclist Aileen McGlynn, who started cycling

at the age of eight, was also recognised, following a new world record she set in the 1km tandem time trial alongside Ellen Hunter in Athens.

Also receiving MBEs for services to disabled sport were gymnastics coach Harold Sharpe and Ruth Small, for her success in the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

Small, who won a gold medal in lawn bowls, said she was "absolutely delighted" about the honour. She took up the sport when she was 62, two years after losing her sight, and paid tribute to her husband and coach Jack, who tells her which direction to roll her bowl.

She said: "Being competitive has helped me to come to terms with my disability."

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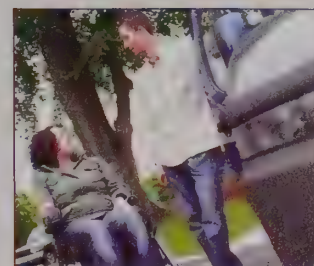


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The parents who kill

In two recent high-profile court cases, parents who have killed their disabled children have been spared jail. What does this say about society's attitude towards disability and where will it end, asks Priya Kotecha?

In December, Andrew Wragg, a former member of the SAS, walked free from court despite pleading guilty to the manslaughter of his severely disabled son Jacob.

Jacob, who had Hunter's syndrome, was a "spirited, happy and unique" ten-year-old, who lived with his family in Worthing, West Sussex. His father smothered him to death in March 2004.

Wragg, who had been cleared by a jury of murder, received a two-year prison sentence for manslaughter, suspended for two years.

A month before, Wendolyn Markcrow also walked free from court after pleading guilty to the manslaughter of her disabled son Patrick at their Buckinghamshire home.

The court heard how Markcrow had used painkillers to tranquillise Patrick, who was 36, and then suffocated him

with a plastic bag. She claimed her local authority had refused numerous requests to help her care for her son. She received the same sentence as Wragg – two years in prison, also suspended for two years. The judge, Mr Justice Gross, said hers was an "exceptional" case and that "a merciful sentence would be the right sentence".

In June 2000, Janquil Turnbull had also walked free from court after pleading guilty to killing her two severely disabled sons, Robert and Richard. She was sentenced to three years probation. The court heard how she had smothered her two sons to death after giving them painkillers. The judge, Mr Justice Turner, called for an inquiry after hearing how the family had been treated by the authorities.

In all three cases, a parent avoided prison despite



Andrew Wragg (left) with son Jacob and brother Chris. Andrew Wragg denied murdering Jacob, but admitted manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility

admitting killing their severely disabled children. In each case, the parent pleaded guilty to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility. And in the coverage of all three cases, the deaths were described in the national media

as "mercy killings".

In the wake of the latest cases, disability campaigners have started raising concerns about what appears to be a sinister trend – in which killing a disabled person is seen as a release from suffering or an act of mercy.

Liz Sayce, director of communications and policy at the Disability Rights Commission, says: "We need to be crystal clear as a whole society, as well as in law, that there is no such thing as 'mercy killing'."

"You simply can't kill somebody else for their own good. It is the greatest of crimes to remove somebody's most fundamental human right to life and we have to treat these acts very, very seriously."

Rachel Hurst, director of Disability Awareness in Action, agrees, saying the sentences are "absolutely appalling". She points out that in similar deaths of non-disabled children "there is never any question of their killers getting off". Because Jacob Wragg was a disabled child, his killing wasn't considered to be "all that bad", she says.

Campaigners are concerned that the sentences could set a dangerous precedent for future court cases.

Simone Aspis, parliamentary and campaigns worker for the British Council of Disabled People, says: "Let's face it, if the murdered person was non-disabled, I bet the sentence

would not have been so lenient, or, more accurately, serve no deterrent whatsoever. After all, what are the judges saying to members of the public? You will only receive a slap on the wrist if you take a disabled person's life away."

Another common feature of the three cases was that during the trials there were similar defence claims that local authorities had failed to provide parents with the necessary support.

'We need to be crystal clear as a whole society, as well as in law, that there is no such thing as "mercy killing". You simply can't kill somebody else for their own good'

Organisations that work with parents and carers say the parents in the three cases had been coping with "extraordinary circumstances". Christine Lavery, a spokeswoman for the Hunter's Syndrome Support Group, says it is vital to ensure that "local authorities put resources into families when they require it so that parents are not stressed and can no longer plead diminished responsibility".

And Jo Williams, chief executive of the learning difficulties charity Mencap, says: "The lesson we must learn is that families, parents and carers of people with a learning



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and are spared jail

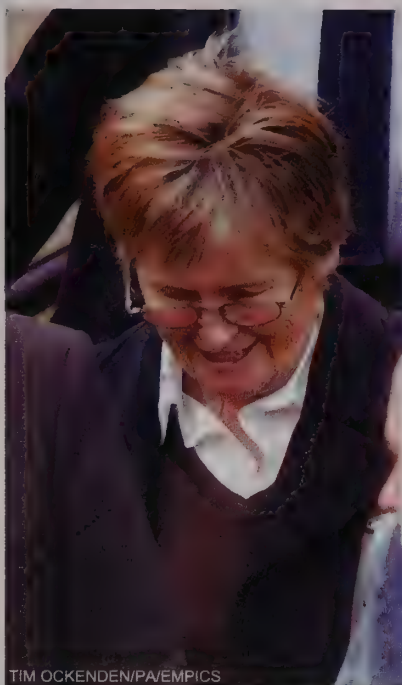
disability need timely, individualised support that accurately reflects the needs of the family based on care assessments".

But funding for such support is stretched, with widespread cutbacks in social services and rationing of services for families with severely disabled children.

A new report by the Commission for Social Care Inspection* says "younger people with disabilities are particularly at risk of losing out from current models of care" and "there is a lack of support for parents in challenging circumstances who, with the right assistance, could look after their children and maintain their families intact".

A report last autumn for the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS)**, highlighted severe "funding pressures" which if not acted upon would put an "unacceptable" demand on learning disability services.

Jeff Jerome, joint chair of the ADSS's disability committee, says: "It's fair to argue that social services are probably not supporting carers enough. That's obviously a funding issue from central government. A proper look at the funding needs to happen.



Wendolyn Markcrow outside Reading Crown Court, where she was charged with the murder of her son Patrick, 36, who had Down's syndrome

I suspect that would identify a resource shortfall."

But Tara Flood, head of politics and policy at the charity Scope, says the lack of support provided to parents and carers should not be allowed to cloud the issue. "Whether social services are not being supportive is just not the issue. These suspended sentences give out the strong message that disabled people's lives are lacking in value, to the

point where if they are killed it's not deemed murder. I think it's a tragedy."

Under proposals put forward by the Law Commission in December***, UK law could for the first time recognise "mercy killings".

Danny Simpson, a human rights and criminal lawyer, says: "The whole point is that the law doesn't recognise mercy killings. Under the current system, there is no defence to murder. It clearly states that it is a crime to kill somebody. Any deliberate killing is murder."

Because of this, the Wragg, Markcrow and Turnbull cases were fought on the grounds of diminished responsibility, which focused on the impact caring for a disabled child or adult had on the killer's mental state. "This [diminished responsibility] defence was never anticipated to apply in these circumstances," says Mr Simpson.

He says the introduction of mercy killing could result in a "slippery slope" that ultimately "diminishes the seriousness of a killing".

"From a legal and ethical

point of view, it's wrong to ever lessen the seriousness of a killing by defence to a medical condition. It's a very large step and one which we would want to think very hard about."

'It is frightening to see a society which regularly triumphs its commitment to anti-discrimination so willing to buy into the presumption that some human beings are of lesser value'

A Prolife Alliance spokeswoman says the proposal is "very bad news". "The Law Commission proposals endorsing a mentality that some lives are of more value than others would further legitimise the philosophy of eugenics which contaminates society today.

"It is frightening to see a society which regularly triumphs its commitment to anti-discrimination so willing to buy into the evil of 'mercy killing' with the presumption that some human beings are of lesser value and therefore better off dead."

The Home Office has yet to decide whether to introduce a

new "mercy killing" law. A spokeswoman says: "We are not commenting on the specifics. When the Law Commission has finished its consultation, they will be putting together a report. We will study this in detail and take forward what needs to be taken forward."

But even though the Home Office has yet to approve the proposals, Ms Flood says disability organisations need to unite and speak out on the issue to avoid the risk that the three cases, and the Law Commission report, could place the lives of many more disabled people in danger.

"We must come together to say enough is enough," she says. "We are human beings and we have as much right to be living and breathing as anybody else."

* *The State of Social Care in England 2004-05*, tel: 0845 015 0120, www.csci.org.uk

** *Pressures on learning disability services – the case for review by Government of current funding*, tel: 020 7072 7433, www.adss.org.uk

*** www.lawcom.gov.uk or call the criminal law team for a free copy of the overview/summary, tel: 020 7453 1288

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WHO HAS THE MOST INFLUENCE?

DN's search for the UK's most influential disabled people is hotting up – but there's still time to send us your nominations.

After you have made your nominations, a panel of leading disabled people will draw up a shortlist to show who has the most significant impact on the lives of the UK population.

Nominations so far have highlighted people from across the public spectrum; the arts, science, sport and, of course, the disability field. But we must stress we are not giving out awards and we are not searching for the most popular disabled person – instead we are looking for disabled people who have made a significant impact on all members of the public.

Who do you think has the most influence? Is it a disabled actor who appears on our screens every week? Is it a sports star or businessperson? Make your nomination, and be in with a chance of winning £50, by filling in the form below or by visiting *DNonline* at www.disabilitynow.org.uk.

**WIN
£50!**

Tell us your
most influential
disabled person
below

YOUR NOMINATIONS

Readers make their choices

I think **Mat Fraser** should be nominated. His cutting, astute and intelligent look at how disabled people are perceived by non-disabled people and his ability to challenge disablism and politicians who claim to be "disabled friendly" makes him a powerful and funny man.

Wayne Crocker, Wales

I vote for **Bert Massie** (right) for the good work and great leadership he has given the Disability Rights Commission.

Iyola Olafimihaan



Tanni Grey Thompson has been a great inspiration to spectators of disabled sport as well as future Paralympians. She has done it in a way that the person you see is Tanni and not the "poor disabled person".

Karen Collins, Edinburgh



I nominate **Kim Tserkerzie** (left) for her portrayal of Penny Pocket in BBC's *Balamory*. She has increased awareness of disability among many young people. Her influence may take longer to come to fruition than some nominees, but it is worth applauding her commitment.

Mark Baggley, Hull

Stephen Hawking is living proof that severe physical disability is no barrier to success; the body may be disabled but the brain isn't!

BE, Lancashire

I vote for **Alison Lapper** (right) for increasing the visibility of disabled individuals in the public sphere and for challenging the traditional depiction of disabled people.

Emma Frost, Midlands



SEND US YOUR NOMINATIONS

Fill in this form and send it to the address at the bottom – or fill out the form online – to nominate the disabled person you think is most influential in the UK.

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Occupation: _____

Are you disabled? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you employed by a disability organisation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, which one? _____

Do you belong to any disability organisation(s)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, which one/s? _____

Please tell us, in no more than 100 words for each person, who you think the UK's most influential disabled people are and why? (You can name more than one and continue on a separate sheet of paper if you wish):

Would you like your nomination to remain confidential (anonymous quotes may be used)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Send your nominations to "Influential people", Freepost, Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London, N7 9PW or fill in our online form at www.disabilitynow.org.uk

Entries without names, contact details and employment/membership declaration will not be accepted.

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Siobhan loves all food, she is able to crawl and sleeps all through the night. She loves playing with toys especially her book that makes farmyard noises, and snuggling up to her fluffy caterpillar at night.

Siobhan has severe medical difficulties, which will affect her physical and learning development. Siobhan's cultural and ethnic background is white UK.

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CELEB SCENE

TANNI GREY THOMPSON

The BBC plays a key role in promoting UK disability sport, but we need more worldwide interest to secure our future

British athletes are in the enviable position of having a supportive media, which reports on a fair proportion of what we do. The BBC in particular does a great job – as reflected by the number of awards it wins for the quality of its sports reporting, not just in the UK, but around the world.

In the past few weeks, the BBC has been honoured by the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation and the International Paralympic Committee for their coverage of the Athens Games. The second award was for both the extent of their coverage and the quality of the reporting. It will be a long time, if ever, before another broadcaster will be able to touch the BBC.

Not that it's easy for broadcasters. Regulations like international media rights restrict what companies can do, but it reflects well on the British media that they take disability athletics reporting so seriously. Other European

countries have some coverage, but it's nowhere near the level that we have and US athletes feel apologetic – some even angry – at the lack of coverage they get on mainstream TV.

I recently spent time in Beijing talking to sports administrators. It was an interesting experience. Just when we think we have a tough time here promoting inclusion, I hear about what happens in Tonga and India and I realise we don't have it anywhere near so bad.

In these countries, what can be done to promote disability sport – particularly when their media aren't interested? Maybe more needs to be done by international sporting federations. If the punch of the Paralympics couldn't do it, maybe the powerhouses of sport can.

The International Tennis Federation offers a heartening case study. Its work in developing countries is reaping astonishing rewards. Millions

play the sport in Europe and North America, but the Federation realises that if they can get into China, India and South America then they will secure more support – and coverage – than other sports can dream of.

The investment which the Tennis Federation is putting into its overseas development will pay dividends far into the future. Unless similar sums are invested into other sports, then they will get left behind.

I can see a situation in the not-too-distant future when tennis will be the main disability sport reported by the international media. This coverage will encourage more young disabled people than ever to play the sport – and will safeguard its future.

As an athlete rather than a tennis player I suppose I'm slightly jealous of this. But I also say good luck to them – they have put the work in, and they deserve every benefit they and their sport will get.

Dame Tanni is the UK's most successful Paralympic athlete and a disability campaigner



TOP TALK

PHIL FRIEND

We need to fight for the right to bathe when we like

Just before Christmas I had lunch with three leading disability rights supporters. Before long our conversation turned to concerns over the future of the independent living movement.

Centres for Independent Living (CILs) have developed some of the UK's most inventive initiatives on social inclusion for disabled people. However, my companions expressed deep unease over the emergence of policies that are leading to user-led CILs losing their contracts to non-user-led bodies.

During lunch, I recalled my involvement with Glyn Vernon back in the 1990s. Glyn was then vice-chair of Scope and was committed to improving the life chances of disabled people. Over the years I got to know Glyn well and worked closely with him on a number of projects.

One I remember particularly well was a

workshop in Milton Keynes attended by 12 disabled people. We spent a day exploring the issues around user-involvement and empowerment. The workshop was lively and thought-provoking.

Then, late in the day, a door at the back of the room opened, a man entered and beckoned to Glyn, who said it was time for him to leave. I asked why and he said it was his bath night and that if he wasn't home by 7pm he would have to wait another week for a bath! I couldn't believe my ears – the vice-chair of a major charity forced to leave because of the inflexibility of his care arrangements.

No matter how much has changed in the past ten years, I don't want to return to a time where my care package is developed by a non-user led organisation who decide when they'll get me up, when they'll put me to bed and when I take a bath; do you?

Phil is chair of RADAR and co-owner of disability consultancy Churchill, Minty and Friend



WORLD VIEW

ABIGAIL LOCK

Disabled women with HIV in Africa are being all but ignored

Around 14 February each year, we are bombarded by images of romance. As Valentine's card sales go through the roof it is all too easy to forget the serious issues surrounding sexual abuse that affect many disabled people around the world.

Recent reports from some African countries have highlighted a belief that having sex with virgins can cure HIV or AIDS. Most stories have focused on the rapes of young children and babies, but what has rarely been reported is that these beliefs have also led to an increase in incidents of rape and abuse – and therefore HIV infection – among disabled women.

Campaigners offer a number of reasons for the increase, including the ingrained belief in some communities that disabled

women are asexual and therefore must be virgins.

Disabled women also tend to be more socially isolated with lower literacy skills and have little access to information about their rights. This means they are less likely to report rapes and those that do are often not believed or ignored. The impact of the attacks is made worse because of inadequate advice and support.

Healthcare clinics and service providers often refuse to test – let alone treat – disabled women with HIV/AIDS because health workers simply will not believe they are able to contract the virus.

Fortunately, successful HIV programme pilots for disabled people have been launched in Uganda and South Africa (not to mention Thailand and the US). But there remains an urgent need for many more.

Abigail has an MSc in gender and international relations, with a focus on disability, and is parliamentary affairs officer at Scope



KEY NOTES

ANDY RICKELL

The Disability Rights Commission will close its doors next year. Should we be worried about the future?

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) will close its doors early next year and many of its functions will transfer to a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR).

This organisation will cover equality and human rights issues around disability, race, gender, age, sexuality and religion or belief.

What does this mean for disabled people and how should we react?

The DRC offered something symbolic in UK society. It was the first body to enforce and offer advocacy for laws based on disability as a civil rights issue and to have anything like the resources necessary for such work.

It was also the first public body to consciously have a majority of disabled people leading it.

It is the loss of such symbolic leadership that

has caused the disabled people's lobby to question the move from the DRC to the CEHR.

In negotiations to set up the CEHR, some of which involved myself as the then chief executive of the British Council of Disabled People, the disabled people's lobby pushed to retain a strong focus on disability, in spite of opposition.

Such a focus will be retained, to a degree, but it is inevitable that disability will have to compete for resources with the other strands of work.

So who will champion disabled people's rights in society after the DRC goes and ensure both in government and the CEHR that disability issues are not downgraded?

The new Office for Disability Issues and the National Forum for Organisations of Disabled People will help, but they are

both meant to be part of government; we need an independent voice too.

The disabled people's movement has the commitment to human and civil rights, but lacks resources, while other disability organisations have more resources but less commitment.

We need to have a debate about how this can change to ensure that independent voices of disabled people are heard.

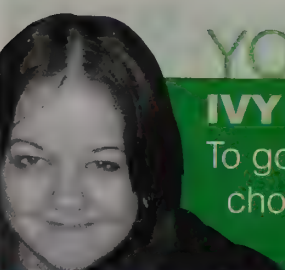
Is this really necessary? Well, with recent disablist legal judgments such as the father who deliberately killed his disabled son not being found guilty of murder, new disablist legislation like the Mental Capacity Act, which gives additional rights to others to make decisions on behalf of disabled people, and daily human rights violations against disabled people, I think it is.

Andy is executive director for diversity, politics and planning at Scope

YOUTH SPEAK

IVY BROADHEAD

To go tall or small when choosing a Valentine's date – that is the question



Valentine's Day rolls round again and although I can't say for sure that I won't get any cards, I have to report that I don't expect any – although, never sending any myself, it would be hypocritical to take it personally if my mailbox isn't overflowing.

As a disabled person – and a teenage girl, more to the point – relationships are something of a minefield. I am a happy, reasonably confident person with friends and family who have always supported me. In general I accept and even appreciate myself and my body, with all of its differences.

Because of this, I've never succumbed to gruesome limb-lengthening surgeries, nor do I intend to, but it's still hard not to compare myself unfavourably with the swathes of tall, skinny girls who stroll past, never needing to question whether they are going to be able to make the walk to the bus stop. I am also cursed with a group of singularly attractive friends, which makes matters worse (I'm considering exchanging them in the January sales).

Admittedly, it's a rare teenager, tall or small, who

doesn't question their appearance from time to time.

To go tall or small when choosing a man – that is the question, and it is one that I debate much with my short friends. If you choose tall, then there's always the question of why did he choose me, and not the girl who can see over the bar? But if you opt for small, there's the problem of whether they chose me because they're actually interested in me, or because they were just kind of desperate.

It sometimes feels like in the minds of non-disabled guys I inhabit a kind of platonic space. Sure, I'm a girl, but I'm one who is completely outside of the girlfriend equation – forever banished to the "just good friends" wasteland.

While with smaller guys, size isn't as much of an issue, but a new difficulty often arises; although you might be able to look each other in the eye, whether you see eye to eye on anything else is a different matter entirely.

So far I'm yet to find the ideal – a dwarf I have something in common with, or a taller guy who can deal with the fact that I'm a little bit smaller than your average 17-year-old.

Ivy, 17, lives in Gateshead and is studying for her A levels.

TEEN SPIRIT

JOSEPH CORNFORTH

Acting has given me confidence, a passion and future



I have a learning difficulty and although I am 18 I did not move to mainstream school until two years ago. I now realise it might have been better for my learning to have gone sooner, but being at a special school with smaller classes gave me the confidence I need – particularly to act – which is my passion.

I think I enjoy acting because of my autism. This probably has something to do with role-playing. I feel like I act all the time, as I have to try hard to fit in. Also, I enjoy the challenge of acting like someone else and there's probably something I like about not being myself but someone completely different. I can escape some of the things I find

difficult in everyday life.

Getting a place at Kensington and Chelsea College to do a BTEC course in performing arts acting was fantastic. The main tutor, Matthew, is a young American director. He is a lot of fun but takes the work seriously. We have to work hard.

I get support with some parts of the course, like with written work. I hated support at school as it felt like there was something wrong with me, but now everyone is easy to get on with and I don't feel threatened – it's easier to express myself.

I hope to go to drama school next year and try for a career in acting. It might seem optimistic, but I believe I can do it.

When did we give up?

After decades spent fighting institutionalism, the disabled people's movement is abandoning those locked away, says Alan Holdsworth

The Labour government would have us believe things are getting better for disabled people and that more of us are living independent lives. But the fact is, as reported in *DN* last month, the number of disabled people living in institutions is growing.

Why is this? Firstly, disabled people make others a mountain of money. Owners, investors and workers in the institution industry make millions a year – but only if their beds are filled. Jobs, investments and entrenched beliefs are at stake and industry bigwigs are well organised to lobby MPs. The government still has representatives from organisations like the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, which runs many institutions, advising them at the highest level.

Secondly, the leadership of the disabled people's movement is failing those locked away. Institutional living is, from direct personal experience of the mental health system, deeply discriminatory. But the movement has grown insular, scared, fragmented and selfish. This is not all its own fault. Charities' archaic notion that they are part of the solution is



How it used to be: DAN activists protest against the DDA

perhaps the biggest barrier that organisations of disabled people face. Charities are reluctant to give up their position at the ear of government and they have become so fragmented and split into impairment-specific organisations, that they actively work against organisations led by disabled people rather than nurturing them.

Thirdly, and most worryingly, the organisations that used to bang us up are starting to use the terminology of independent living to drag resources away from the disabled-led independent living movement. Rather than joining in the struggle, they try to redefine it so they can compete

with grass-roots disability organisations for the crumbs the government throws at them.

Meanwhile DAN, the disabled people's Direct Action Network, which stood up for those in institutions, has all but gone (and if it hasn't gone, where is the action?). There is no-one left with the commitment, leadership and energy to take on this fight.

We are abandoning those we should be fighting for and the number of disabled people in institutions is growing – lying in their own faeces, waiting for a nurse for an hour. This marks a huge step back for all of us. Alan Holdsworth is a former member of DAN who now campaigns in the US and UK

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Letters to the Editor

Send your letters to the acting editor Sarah Hobson, Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW, minicom: 020 7619 7332, fax: 020 7619 7331, email: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

No need to celebrate Routemaster's demise

I would like to comment on your recent articles on the removal of the remaining Routemaster buses from London.

I am the carer of my wife, who has had Parkinson's disease for 18 years and now uses a wheelchair when outside our home. We regularly use public transport, so we are familiar with the problems of access in London and elsewhere, but I take issue over your attitude towards the Routemaster buses, which served Londoners reliably for nearly 50 years.

Why should 1,000 wheelchair users be able to spoil the enjoyment of the majority of non-disabled people, and also disabled people?

What about people with sensory impairments, mental health problems and learning

difficulties who welcomed assistance from the Routemaster's conductors?

At least Routemasters will remain on heritage routes. These will run along existing routes 9 and 15, so wheelchair users should be unaffected.

It is worth pointing out that the much vaunted Bendy Buses, which have replaced Routemasters, have suffered from serious fires. I hope, if this occurs again, wheelchairs users on board are able to escape.

I was annoyed to read about frivolous protests when plans for the buses were already finalised. Protestors would be better off focusing on the real needs of disabled travellers – for example, improving access at the majority of train and tube stations.

John Hayward, Burgess Hill, West Sussex

Good riddance Blunkett

I totally disagree with Anne Begg, the MP who last month said that former work and pensions secretary David Blunkett was brought down by a "media witch-hunt" (DN, January).

It was bloody marvellous to see Mr Blunkett getting back just a little bit of the nastiness his party is so fond of dishing out. Down the years he has been an integral part of lying, cheating, pro-capitalist governments, and the whole New Labour project, which delighted in bullying the weakest, most vulnerable

people while helping the rich to get richer, at the expense of the poor getting poorer.

If Mr Blunkett really does understand what it is like to be discriminated against, he has never learnt the empathy to go with it.

When I acquired my disability after more than 40 years, it did not stop me recognising a bully and I did not acquire a compassion bypass either.

All the people who have inspired me, whether disabled or not, never took any part in making life more difficult for

'Icon Blunkett brought down'

BY JOHN PRICE
A disabled Labour MP, Anne Begg, has said that former work and pensions secretary David Blunkett was brought down by a "media witch-hunt".
She said the press had been "out to get him".
"I am a disabled person and I know what it is like to be discriminated against," she said. "I have never learnt the empathy to go with it."
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"I am a disabled person and I know what it is like to be discriminated against," she said. "I have never learnt the empathy to go with it."

other people.

We're always appealing for the non-disabled world to look beyond the disability to see the person – we need to do that too.
Colin Yates, by email

There was no witch-hunt – just folly

So, Anne Begg thinks the same media organisations that led to David Blunkett's resignation are now running scare stories about the government's proposals on the reform of Incapacity Benefits?

I find it hard to believe that they are just scare stories.

It is well known and documented that Mr Blunkett resigned twice for his "misdemeanours". As a consequence, I fail to

understand how a media witch-hunt brought him down.

Surely it was his own actions that were responsible for his downfall?

Arthur Lodge-Johnston, Tyne & Wear

DIALs still best for disability advice

I was delighted to see your reference to DIAL UK on the January "Dear Rachel" page.

But, as the organisation's chair, I am aware it does not receive the recognition it deserves as the national organisation supporting our disability advice centres,

which are invariably overlooked in favour of local citizen's advice bureaux (CAB).

I am fully supportive of CAB and work closely with a local CAB service director, exploring ways of forming an advice alliance to promote independent advice on social welfare law. No-

one can touch CABs for many areas of advice, particularly debt advice, but DIALs continue to be the specialists on disability information.

Marion Youens, DIAL UK chair and chief executive of DIAL Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin



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Adverts for Tesco prompt trolley folly

In several issues of DN, Tesco has placed a full page advertisement (right) stating how committed they are to making shopping easier for everyone. It includes a photograph of a wheelchair user pushing a certain type of trolley.

My local Tesco store, in Fleetsbridge, Poole, used to have that type of trolley, but over time they have disappeared. The new ones, with different clamps, are not compatible with my wife Anne's wheelchair, and no-one at the store knows the name or part number of the old trolleys.

I rang Tesco's customer services helpline in August last year, but all they told me was that they have wheelchair-friendly trolleys in stores across the country. After further questioning, I was told Tesco's advertising department had not heard of DN! Is there anyone out there who could tell me the name of the trolley, so I can tell Tesco and enable the store to

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- Induction loops at our customer service desks and checkouts
- Or simply shop from home at www.tesco.com

honour its slogan of "every little helps"?

Colin Price, by email

Editor – We passed your comments onto Tesco. Here is their reply: "We are sorry Mr Price did not receive the information he required. Following research with customers, we are replacing our old wheelchair-compatible models and have tried to find the most compatible trolley – with positive feedback. We are sorry if this is not the case with Mrs Price's wheelchair. The process to replace trolleys does take time and we did not intend the photo to be misleading."

web watch

All the latest from the Disability Now forums and Have your say pages, found at www.disabilitynow.org.uk

How do you tackle pain?

Anyone know anything about prescription and over the counter painkillers? I take codeine for my Fibromyalgia but the stuff won't touch my headaches. Bizarrely, two Anadin Extra wipe it out, even though the rest of my body remains in agony. Has anyone else experienced this? Have you found something that works all round without sending you off to La-la Land?
WitchyBabe

All drugs have side effects. Sadly, for those of us with chronic pain we have little choice but to live with the effects of drugs. I take DHC, which is codeine, but when I went to the spinal injuries unit in London the doctors explained that even morphine does not take away all pain – it is a specific pain killer. What you need to do is investigate the reasons behind the headaches. Maybe you are starting to get high blood pressure or your drugs may be affecting you. Your GP will be able to help you more.
Rob

Some sorts of headache are most easily relieved by massage. Others can be fixed by drinking more water or, oddly enough, by consuming small amounts of caffeine.
Jennie

Drink water! It needs to be fresh – straight out of the tap. It's great for restoring oxygen levels too; I can really feel it boosting me. That's been proved in schools where kids are encouraged to drink water to improve their concentration and energy.
ELayne

Have your say and join others chatting at www.disabilitynow.org.uk

Stop asking what's wrong with me!

I have limited walking/standing and I am in constant pain. I am tired of people asking me what is wrong with me. Many people are genuinely concerned, I know, but as this disability is so much a part of my life, I am fed up with it and do not want to have to keep discussing it. Has anyone got any ideas of what I can say that would not be rude?
Sally

If someone asks how I am, I normally just say: "I have felt better." Sadly, I don't think the majority of non-disabled people have any understanding of how people with chronic illness or disability feel.
Jim

How about just telling the truth? Narrow it down to a few lines or sentences and just hit them with the truth. When I do, most people are too frightened to ask any more, whereas kind and considerate people will show you understanding.
Shaun

How about a big (enigmatic!) smile and the cheerful reply: "Nothing, I'm just lazy!" I like this approach – so much so that I have it printed on a sweatshirt, so I don't even have to say it.
Sian

If I'm not in my wheelchair, I say: "If it weren't for the morphine, the cannabis and the wine, I'd be in a wheelchair!", or if I'm already in my chair, then I say: "The morphine and the wine and too much sex did this to me." I find that if I can make a joke about it, then I feel better. Some people say to me: "Be serious, what IS wrong?", to which I reply: "Nothing, I was born like this and I'm waiting to die like this too." That usually shuts 'em up.
dogposhpaws

I have multiple sclerosis and a catalogue of other problems. One day a physio at the hospital said to me: "You don't look ill to me." I politely replied: "You take my body for 24 hours and when you give it back tell me how ill I am." I then thanked him and walked out.
Denise

backchat

● An early frontrunner in DN's search for the UK's most influential disabled people is Bert Massie, chair of the Disability Rights Commission. Decades of campaigning for disability rights and, according to Commission for Racial Equality chair Trevor Phillips, "rat-like cunning", is likely to see Massie shortlisted.

Unfortunately, his influence doesn't seem to extend as far as Network Rail. Staff were apparently "too busy" recently to provide the wheelchair assistance he had booked at Euston station for a train to Liverpool.

● Talking of our Influence List, Gordon Brown could have picked a better time for his latest announcement.

As the Welsh Assembly was hearing how a woman with multiple sclerosis had to go without food to pay her fuel bills, Brown was announcing £300 million of new measures to help pensioners through the winter.

Backchat can feel our Iron Chancellor's influence slipping by the hour...

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Making Light work of it

Richard Light's work on the UN draft convention on disability could safeguard the rights of millions worldwide. He talks to Elizabeth Choppin about apathy, arguments and global warming

When meeting disability rights activist Dr Richard Light for the first time, it is difficult to know whether he will snarl at you or give a friendly hello – he has a reputation of not suffering fools gladly.

But this is good news for the many millions of people affected by his work – he is the UK's disabled representative for the United Nations (UN) draft convention on disability, which earned him RADAR's international human rights award in December.

He admits to being kept awake at night worrying about whether he is up to the job, despite years of academic and campaigning experience.

The convention, aimed at improving rights for disabled people around the world, is expected to be finalised and ratified by the UN's 191 member states in 2007. It should ensure that nations offer equal access to employment, independent living, transport, leisure facilities and so on.

But there is much to be done before Richard and disability groups in the UK will be

WHO IS HE?

Dr Richard Light, 46, was born in Malta and spent much of his childhood in Bahrain. He moved to England and worked as a police officer before becoming disabled in a car accident in his late 20s. He has been involved in the disability rights movement for 15 years and was nominated for the UN position by the British Council of Disabled People in 2002. He has also worked for Disability Awareness in Action. He is married and has two daughters.

satisfied with the final document. Particular concerns involve extending protection for children, safeguarding the right to life and consent for medical treatment. "Several cases in the UK have given us cause for concern that disabled people's fundamental right to life is far from secure," he says.

Although the government is being urged not to sign up to the treaty until improvements have been made, Richard believes the convention is not getting the attention it deserves from MPs. "I don't know whether disability

is seen as a minority issue or not a sexy issue, but trying to get anyone outside the disability world interested in anything to do with disability seems to be an uphill struggle."

Another difficulty is gaining consensus from each member state. There is, he says, a "massive range of understanding and views", which delays progress.

But he believes things are moving forward. "The attitudes of any number of member states have changed dramatically. At the first session, states were falling over themselves not to say anything. It's enormously gratifying to see the extent to which they have changed their views since."

"Part of me thinks the process itself might be as valuable as the convention, because states are having to address disability issues."

But he admits that monitoring how states implement the new regulations is not going to be easy.

"The convention is not a silver bullet that is going to make everything right, but it is another campaigning tool."

ELIZABETH CHOPPIN



Richard is keen to play down his role in the negotiations, as recognised by the RADAR award. Being placed in the public eye makes him feel uncomfortable. "I think part of the danger is that personalities can overtake issues. That's one of the things that gave me pause about the RADAR award. It's humbling, but I

would be disingenuous if I didn't say that it's fantastic to have one's achievements – whether or not they deserve it – to be publicly identified."

He has made progress, he says, because he lives the experience of a disabled Briton. "It's not that I'm clever. I personalise it. It ceases to be an academic debate when people think about what it means in real life."

'The process itself might be as valuable as the convention, because states are having to address disability issues'

Richard is not considering his next move until his UN work is finished, but no matter what he takes on, he says he will still be campaigning "when they nail the lid on the coffin".

Even though he thinks the UK can hold its head "reasonably high" in terms of disability rights, there is, he says, much more progress to be made. "There isn't a week that goes by when I don't come across a case of people who are far from being supported in their communities, who receive completely inadequate care or assistance and whose human and civil rights are treated with utter contempt.

"I sometimes think disabled people unwittingly have been the cause of global warming because they listen to so much waffling, hot air and rhetoric."



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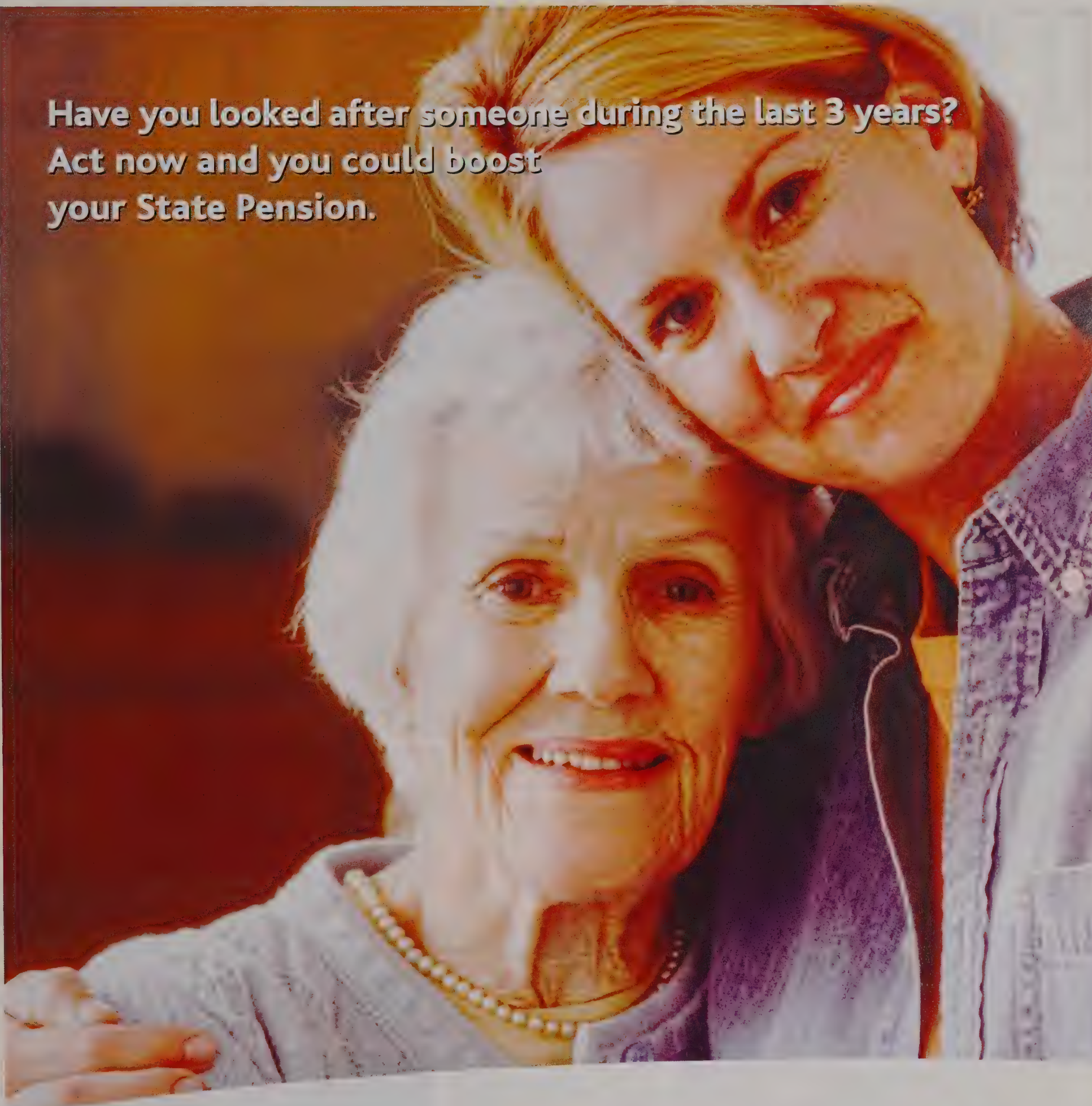
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The food of love

With Valentine's Day just around the corner, we asked readers Adam Thomas and Agnes Fletcher to see how attitudes and access could help or hinder a romantic night on the town

Adam says: These days, we stay in more than we go out – work and travel means we often both need to take it easy at the weekends. When we do go out, we usually visit the football, cinemas, theatres and restaurants. Very occasionally we go to a gig. I used to go to them two or three times a week, but that ended when I went back to full-time work and it was difficult for Agnes standing for hours – particularly when she was waiting for her hip replacement.

Agnes says: We fancied going to the cinema and for a meal. Often when we go to the theatre, Adam has a really uncomfortable time. The wheelchair space is usually on a slope and he either spends the time feeling like he's falling forward or has to balance on his back wheels for the whole performance. Unfortunately, many recent access "improvements" to cinemas mean that the only wheelchair space is right at the front,

which neither of us like – you have to do the whole "ping-pong" thing with your eyes to take in the whole screen.

Adam says: Someone recommended a recently opened independent cinema a few miles from us – The Rex in Berkhamsted, so we thought we'd give it a go. It was great. There was a fantastic atmosphere and it was very friendly. It's an old cinema so there is a separate entrance for wheelchair users – but the inside layout is good and there's an accessible loo. The great thing about it was the Art Deco interior and the fact that the downstairs section has cabaret-style tables, nightlights, armchairs on wheels and a bar.

Agnes says: We saw *The Libertine* with Johnny Depp, a raunchy Restoration romp and morality tale about the dangers of too much sex and booze. Afterwards, we moved on to Pizza Express in Amersham. We go to quite a few



Cheers! Agnes and Adam toast to good access in Pizza Express (top); the facilities were great, including the accessible loo (below) and staff were happy to go the extra mile to help out (bottom)

restaurants around Buckinghamshire and in London. Mostly, the access is poor but, for us, manageable: a rickety ramp here, level access but no loo there. Often, there's one step so we're lucky that Adam is pretty strong and I can help him up one step.

Adam says: We chose Pizza Express because we wanted to demonstrate how it can be done: they pretty much get everything right. When we booked they were very friendly and – I think this is a first – when we arrived they'd already moved my chair out the way. We'd asked for a seat near the front, to avoid the usual "Excuse me... oops... sorry... if you could just stand up, scrape your chair back, get everyone's attention before I squeeze past, knocking your bag and coat onto the floor!"

In fact, the layout was great. There was plenty of space around the tables, and we were out of the draught for once.

Agnes says: The staff were great – and there were plenty of them in case you needed help with the menu.

We explained that we were writing for *DN* about access issues and the manager was well-informed about the chain's plans to overhaul its



restaurants nationwide.

The lighting was relaxing but it wasn't too dim to make lip reading hard. There was no background music and the acoustics meant that we didn't have to shout.

Adam says: The amazing thing about this place is that they actually have two accessible loos – for people who prefer a left or right-hand transfer.

Agnes says: We like going to independent places, and some of them have really made the effort to get it right.

Sometimes, though, especially if you're going to be visiting a new place, it can be simpler to go with a big chain you know will have good access rather than risk having the evening ruined because the wrong answers have been given over the phone.

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LOVE LIST The dos and don'ts of dating

Agree with your date

- 1 Don't go to the cinema where you can't actually speak to each other. That way, you won't find out on the second date that the person is really a complete freak.
- 2 Be considerate of the person you are with. If she has high heels on, don't make her walk for miles and miles while you're looking for a suitable place to go.
- 3 There is no easy way to navigate the first kiss. Hopefully it should be natural. With more experience of dating, these things get easier.
- 4 Once you are in a relationship just try and agree with her on everything.

Luke Hamill, actor

Don't take your mates

- 1 As tempting as it might be, do not bring friends along on a first date.
- 2 We live in a society where gay people are not fully accepted, so join groups to reduce isolation and meet people.
- 3 Be positive about disability – it's only one aspect of your life.
- 4 If conversation dies down, talk about what has been on TV, the news or current events. If all else fails, get another drink!
- 5 Say "no" if you don't want to go as far physically as your date does. If they don't respect your decision, then maybe they're not right for you.

James Odell, Glams, support group for gay men with MS.
Tel: 0207 837 7324, <http://lgs.org.uk>

Stop moaning!

- 1 Disabled women can feel more vulnerable on a first date. Don't make them uncomfortable by staring at their bodies.
- 2 Keep the conversation light. Be positive rather than negative. Moaning about your problems is not a turn on.
- 3 Never ask about disability straight away – you're getting to know the person, not their disability.
- 4 It might pay to check out the venue early to find out about ramps, stairs and loos in order to help you and your date feel at ease in your surroundings.

- 5 I always take a post-it note in my pocket with conversation topics and questions to ask my date. That way, if I find myself with nothing to say, I discreetly refer to it.

- 6 Don't be aggressive and try to move too fast towards sex – it doesn't work.

Nigel Anderson, co-founder of TLC, a website that advises on sex workers. www.tlc-trust.org.uk

Don't become a mum

- 1 To get a date, don't sit alone at home and think about it. Pick up the phone and talk to a gay switchboard, go to a party or join a club. Be proactive.
- 2 Avoid dance clubs for initial dates – it is hard to hear anything the person is saying.
- 3 Be honest about your impairment – it makes things easier.
- 4 Do not assume anything about the other person and what they are capable of doing. Ask them or wait for them to ask you. For instance if you decide to start cutting their food, a date is going to feel like he or she is out with their mum.

Ruth Butler, researcher for Rainbow Ripples, a disabled lesbian, gay and bisexual group.
Tel: 0113 307 3280, info@leedsinvolvement.co.uk

Don't drink...too much

- 1 The demon drink can make you do things you wouldn't dream of doing sober, so alternate alcohol with soft drinks to avoid the "I can't believe I did that" morning feeling.
- 2 Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are on the rise. No-one can afford to be complacent. Even if you don't think your date will lead to sex, carry condoms in case.
- 3 Do not assume a date will tell you if they have a STI – they may be too embarrassed or not even know.
- 4 If you think you have picked up an infection, don't panic, but do get yourself checked out. Symptoms may not be obvious, or may come and go, despite you still being infected. You can go to your local GUM clinic and get tested anonymously.

Sally Wright, Terrence Higgins,
tel: 0845 12 21 200, www.tht.org.uk



Learn from mistakes

- 1 Remind carers that you need privacy if you are on a date.
- 2 It can help to stay close to home in case you need to end the date abruptly.
- 3 From date to date, or relationship to relationship, learn from your mistakes.

Michelle Howson, West Yorkshire

Don't get too friendly

- 1 Ask someone out whether you think they will reject you or not. If you ask a lot of people, some of them are going to say yes.
- 2 Once you have a date, relax – but put some effort into the planning of it. The most common mistake is to not find out what the person likes to do beforehand.
- 3 It might be okay to touch a date's arms and hold them in a caring way, but it is best to stay away from their front, torso, back or head. No nervous groping!
- 4 A woman should not get into a car of someone she does not know – for example, of a person met over the Internet.
- 5 Have fun! Remember that dating is supposed to be enjoyable!

Tuppy Owens, co-founder of the Outsiders Trust, which runs a social club and campaigns on relationship issues for disabled people, tel: 020 7354 8291, www.outsiders.org.uk

Useful contacts

Outsiders Club – self-help group for disabled people to find partners, tel: 020 7354 8291, helpline: 0707 499 3527, www.outsiders.org.uk

Disabled United – dating website aimed at disabled people, tel: 020 8679 7622, www.disabledunited.com

Cupid Calls – dating website encouraging disabled people, PO Box 6134, Leicester, LE3 3WA, www.cupidcalls.co.uk

Central Rainbow – deaf gay/lesbian social group, Birmingham, tel: 0121 478 0562

Wild Bunch Club – club night for people with learning difficulties, London, tel: 020 7359 7443, www.wildbunchclub.com

DNOnline – Large personals section with disabled people from around the world looking for friends and more, www.disabilitynow.org.uk

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Rediscovered pleasure

Sophie Morgan thought she would never enjoy sex again after the accident that left her paralysed. Rediscovering pleasure in the bedroom has been a long process, but with her new man she is finally beginning to enjoy the intimacy she once did

Two years ago I had a car accident that left me paralysed from the waist down. I was 18 and was in a relationship that had been going for three years. It didn't look like ending any time soon. We had a good sex life – I was your typical 18-year-old girl with the typical 18-year-old boyfriend.

My accident was like all accidents; sudden, unjust and incredibly horrible. I woke up paralysed to find a broken family and a heartbroken boyfriend. He lived with me through the accident and rehab and the first months of my new disability. I know that he felt as lost as I did, and that he had lost as much as I had.

'I saw my body moving and watched my boyfriend in exactly that same way I once had, but I couldn't feel anything'

I am a "complete injury", which means that I have no movement or feeling from the waist down. I had been in the

Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Stanmore for three months and was ready to go home by the end of November. I had been hoping that I would be able to feel something during sex, although since the moment of my crash I had not been able to feel anything at all.

Unfortunately sex wasn't what it once was. I felt nothing at all. I saw my body moving and watched my boyfriend in exactly the same way I once had, but I couldn't feel anything. I felt broken, useless, dead. More than anything, I felt a whole part of me had been erased. I felt I could no longer be sexual or attractive or appealing to a man and I felt incredibly sad.

But I got on with it. I decided inwardly that I would write off that part of my life – that sex was no longer a part of me. I was no longer a sexual person. I would see beautiful women on TV and in clubs and simply distant myself from them. They lived in a different world to me.

Not that I was unhappy. I wasn't; I was content. I had a life to live – a very busy one.

I grew to know my body and love it. I grew attached to it again and understood what had changed, and how to look after myself. I started college, started travelling and started getting my life going.

'It took me a while to stop feeling worried about my body and I'm still dealing with it. But I'm getting there'

My boyfriend ended our relationship. I was hurt and upset in the same way I would have been with or without my paralysis, yet underneath I felt like I didn't need anyone any more – that all I could need was my friends and my family.

I had masses to achieve and needed to put all my energy and time into travelling, learning new sports and learning to drive again. I crammed my life full to avoid ever feeling lonely and in need of a boyfriend again; I was pretty sure that I wouldn't be able to get one anyway.

I had sex a few more times



CHRIS RICH
Sophie had several "meaningless" flings before finding intimacy

after this but didn't get emotionally attached or involved. Sex had become about the other person – not me any more – and if I didn't care for them then I didn't care for the sex at all. So

meaningless had it become that I felt as if I was being moved around and used for someone else's pleasure. I played little active part. Each time I came away feeling that I was better off without sex and that I'd never orgasm or feel sexually aroused properly again.

This all changed when I met and fell for a man who I care about. Being emotionally attached to someone has allowed me to start enjoying sex again. In truth, it is still mostly about the other person – about deriving pleasure from their pleasure – but the intimacy of sex is greater than it ever was. I now look at my friends having one-night stands and waking up feeling unsatisfied and used and I don't envy them any more.

It took a while for me to let go and stop feeling embarrassed or worried about my body and I'm still dealing with it. But I'm getting there.

Sex and disability seems like something that shouldn't go together. I don't know where that idea came from. But if disabled people feel that way themselves, then we have no-one to blame for our loneliness or insecurity. Sex comes in a million different forms, and everyone is entitled to intimacy, in whatever form they want. It's just a case of finding your own way there, in your own time.

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Time to get equal

It's Time to Get Equal in Wales

In this month's issue of DN we are focusing on the work of Time to Get Equal (TTGE) in Wales.

Since the TTGE launch, the Welsh team has been very busy campaigning for equality throughout Wales. TTGE has been promoted at the National Eisteddfod of Wales and at the Scope Cymru National Conference. We have also taken part in the Free2Pee, Baywatch, Polls Apart and Ticket2Ride campaigns.

Campaigners

Scope Cymru has a great team of nearly 100 committed campaigners. They are sent information on forthcoming campaigns and are given the opportunity to take part and provide ideas for future campaigns.

Last September, a TTGE working group was set up to create campaign ideas. Once ideas are agreed, all campaigners are invited to take part.

One of the TTGE campaigners is Tony Stephenson. Tony (above) has spearheaded our TTGE campaign and is one of our main media contacts, giving interviews for TV and radio. Here is his story:

"My name's Tony Stephenson, I'm 37 and I had an illness that left me paralysed. Although a difficult time, with the support of my family and friends I got through it. I have used a wheelchair for over 10 years and in that time I've become a model, a peer support volunteer for patients and a fundraiser at my local spinal injury unit, Rookwood Hospital. My role spearheading the TTGE campaign in Wales and now as volunteer campaign coordinator with Scope Cymru is very important to me."



Travel Campaign 2005

Scope Cymru's Travel Campaign was a resounding success. Despite awful weather over 30 disabled and non-disabled people took part. Steve Herbert and Beverly Jones, Welsh members of the successful British Paralympics team joined our demonstration helping to distribute campaign materials. Postcards were filled in and sent to Andrew Davies AM Minister for Transport. We received great support from the public – indeed, a group of Cardiff University students asked for materials for all their friends. Our campaign poster was unveiled outside Cardiff Central station (above), bringing to an end a very wet but successful campaign event.

National Assembly

On 23 November, the Scope Cymru TTGE campaign team was invited by Jane Hutt Assembly Member (AM) and Business Minister into the National Assembly of Wales. Scope Cymru's Director, Jacqui Christy-James, and Scope Cymru's Chair, Mandi Glover, led the team of campaigners promoting TTGE. Jacqui gave a live interview for BBC2 Wales discussing Scope Cymru and TTGE. Many AMs visited the stand and we discussed the issues that disabled people face every day. TTGE badges and pledge cards were given out to everyone.

If you would like more information on TTGE Cymru or to get involved, please contact **Michele Kordell** on **029 20662407** or email: **michele.kordell@scopecymru.org.uk**

Or write to: Scope Cymru, The Wharf, Schooner Way, Cardiff, CF10 4EU.

Tony Stephenson and Michele Kordell

www.time.to.get.equal.org.uk

For information on the Time to Get Equal campaign
call: 020 7619 7710
or email: equality.campaign@scope.org.uk

Norwegian dream



Elizabeth Cowley and her daughter Susan discovered the beauty of Norway by boat, foot and coach in an unforgettable holiday

My daughter Susan, who is in her 40s, is a wheelchair user. This year we decided we would go back to Norway. We had been there before for a family holiday on a cruise, so when the brochure arrived from Chalfont, we booked straight away. We chose a 14-day coach tour, taking in the cities of Oslo and Bergen, as well as going to smaller places further inland.

Because the departure was from Newcastle on an overnight ferry we were picked up at the nearest motorway service area, which was very convenient.

The ferry was wheelchair friendly throughout and, after good night's sleep and breakfast, we arrived at Kristiansand. We were led off the ferry to a waiting coach and introduced to our Norwegian guide, who was

with us to our first stop in the capital Oslo. During our journey to Oslo we were told about the customs and politics of Norway and what we would be seeing on our forthcoming tour.

On arrival in Oslo we met our next guide, Jan, who was with us for the rest of the tour. We went on coach outings to the Norsk Folkemuseum, the Viking Ship Museum, the Sculpture Park and other places of interest. We found all of the locations very accessible to anyone who uses a wheelchair.

Our next destination was Lillehammer, best known for its part in the 1994 Winter Olympics. As well as a visit to the town for the usual shopping and lunch our guide took us to the Olympic site where a huge ski jump is still in use.

We ventured up river to Gudvangen, which was amazing. The settlement is a three-hour cruise up the beautiful Sognefjord, the second largest fjord in the world. The boat was accessible, as were the toilets.

Our hotel, the Gudvangen Fjordtel, was in the middle of nowhere and the bedrooms were in a separate block to the main area and restaurant. They were built in a circle with a glass roof, so when you were lying in bed you could see the sky. It was a truly amazing experience.

We then made our way to Bergen via the Flam Railway where we enjoyed some amazing views and some of the

steepest gradients of any railway. Halfway up there was a photo stop at the incredible Kjos waterfall. This railway is an attraction that should not be missed. The train was very accessible and there was lots of help in boarding and disembarking.

Susan and I had been to Bergen before, but only for a few hours, so we were both looking forward to a few days there. It is a wonderful city with plenty of restaurants, cafes, markets and shops. We did both coach and walking tours as well as visiting the home of famous composer Edward Grieg. Whilst there we went up in the vinicular cable car, which had a carriage that could take wheelchairs. The view from the top looked over the whole of Bergen.

Both Susan and I had a fabulous two-week holiday. The tour manager was ready to sort out most problems, be it room access, meals or whatever, but more importantly, if I was not feeling well, I knew there was someone to support Susan.

Chalfont are introducing accessible door-to-door transport that is included in the holiday cost in 2006. I hope this will enable Susan to take her electric wheelchair for the first time so we will travel with them again, wherever we choose to go.

* *Chalfont Line Holidays*,
tel: 01895 459 540,
www.chalfont-line.co.uk



Last summer, my husband Sam and I went to Ile de Re, a pretty little island off the French Atlantic coast that has sandy beaches, beautiful pine forests, miles of car-free cycle tracks, excellent seafood and is conveniently close to La Rochelle airport.

But, as we soon discovered, the island is something of a challenge for anyone with a mobility impairment.

Before setting off, we tried booking an accessible room in the island's top hotel, Le Richelieu, but were told they "did not do" disabled rooms, or words to that effect.

We had also tried hiring a couple of mobility scooters but the request was met with surprised disbelief, so we carted two scooters with us from London courtesy of Ryanair.

A bit miffed, we booked into the only hotel on Ile de Re with accessible rooms, the Au Plaisir in Bois Plage.

To get around, we hired Bernard Dupont, who runs transport services for disabled people, and his large accessible Renault.

We loved the island's pretty villages, the family-friendly sandy beaches, pavement cafes in the capital St Martin, and it is not over-commercialised or developed.

But we did not like the island's lack of facilities for disabled people. There were no ramps to beaches and no accessible public toilets.

I asked the local tourist board why provision for disabled people was so bad. They said that Ile de Re was "protected territory", which took priority over providing buildings suitable for disabled people.

But Bernard was more frank, saying that there seemed to be an attitude from the island's top tourism people that they want Ile de Re to be the St



Tasty feast: Susan Cowley and her mother enjoying their meals

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Email: holidays.with.help@lineone.net



www.nationaltrust.org.uk

French connection



Would you go on holiday somewhere lovely but lacking in facilities for disabled people? Yes, says Judy Graham, if only to shake them up and get things moving for the better



Judy Graham, St Martin's harbour, Pine forests



Tropez of the Atlantic coast, attracting beautiful people to its beaches and cafes, and perhaps disabled people did not fit the bill.

Lucky, there are voices like Bernard, Olivier Bonnenfant, who runs an accessible taxi service and Wilfried Ossah, who rents out sports equipment for disabled people, who have lobbied for better facilities, but progress is slow.

The French tourist board accredits establishments with disabled facilities, but this only amounts to a listing and should

be treated with caution.

Out of around 150 places to stay on Ile de Re, only one hotel, one campsite and one holiday village are listed.

But Mario Hamelin, the owner of Hotel Au Plaisir, is adamant that things will improve for disabled people on Ile de Re.

In 2007 he says he is building a totally accessible four-star hotel in Ars, which, contrary to what its name might suggest, is a charming village. And, from this summer, Bernard will be renting out mobility scooters.

Contacts

Atlantique Assistance Handicap: Bernard Dupont, tel: (00 33) 6 78 99 34 83, www.transhandi.com
Price: €0.83 per kilometre to hire Bernard and vehicle.

Disabled taxi service: Olivier Bonnenfant, tel: (00 33) 5 46 09 04 04

L'Association Handi-Tour-Re: rent handbikes, catamarans, wind-surfers and arrange accessible accommodation in adapted auberges. Wilfried Ossah,

tel: (00 33) 6 64 14 02 33, Wilfried.ossah@handi-tour-re.com

Au Plaisir Hotel, Bois Plage en Re: tel: (00 33) 5 46 09 00 26, www.hotel-plaisir.com
Price: Min €40 Max €120 per room per night

Ile de Re tourist office: tel: (00 33) 5 46 09 00 55, www.iledere.fr

Tourisme & handicap pages, French Tourist Board: tel: 09068 244 123, www.franceguide.com

Cheek and chic

Jane Muir and her son Alastair try out camping and cottages during a coastal break in France and discover the benefits of borrowing accessible facilities



Sometimes the only way to get the best facilities for disabled travellers is to be cheeky.

I discovered this while crossing the channel by ferry with a hangover and trying to find somewhere quiet or comfortable to sit. Surrounded by shrieking school children and whingeing toddlers, we were feeling quite desperate until I asked for the key to the disabled loo for Alastair (above). Lo and behold, the key opened the door to a peaceful, ensuite two-bed accessible cabin, so you can guess where we hid for the rest of our five-hour journey!

We arrived late at night, at a very large accessible campsite, with a tent but no pegs. Looking around in exhaustion and despair, we noticed that we were surrounded by empty, zipped up "rent-a-tents", which soon became "squat-a-tents".

Already I have learnt two valuable lessons; next holiday I will pay extra for an accessible ferry cabin and pre-erected tent.

It was then a long car journey to our gite in the south west of France. Be aware that while French autoroute service stations do have accessible

facilities, there are signs leading to villages with cafes that, on the whole, have loos for very thin people who can squeeze past the sink and vacuum cleaner, and so on.

We spent a tremendous two weeks on the flat oyster country of Charente Maritime. Spelling out our access needs over the phone when booking our gite had been worthwhile.

We quite easily attached our large Kangoo buggy to the back of my bicycle, and with Alastair reclining comfortably we were able to cycle effortlessly for miles through coastal pine forests, stopping at beaches or cafes for refreshment.

We went on a boat excursion from La Cayenne, near Marrennes, to be shown the oyster beds out at sea, which have a fascinating history. We were entranced by the

fishing huts on Ile d'Oleron, many of which are now converted into artists' studios and galleries and, of course, ate seafood to our hearts' content.

On the way back, we stayed in an accessible room in a Formule 1 hotel (equivalent of Travelodge) at the side of autoroute, and dined sumptuously but cheaply at the adjacent truckdrivers' diner.

Contacts

Gites: Seaside France, tel: 01825 767 333, www.seasidefrance.co.uk
Tents: Rentatent, tel: (00 33) 06 78 88 47 38, www.u-rentatent.com
Ferry: PO Ferries, tel: 08705 980 333, www.poferries.com
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Home from home

Harry Heath visited the Park House Hotel in Sandringham for rest and relaxation in a caring environment

I have been staying at Park House with my wife Jill for many years and enjoy every visit, but initially it took some persuading to get me there.

We first visited after I became a wheelchair user. Having spent a year in various hospitals I had become institutionalised and was not particularly happy. I was even less happy at the suggestion that Jill and I try a week's break at Park House, even though I needed something to get me back on track.

I had never heard of the hotel and was not keen to go, having lost my feelings of control and self-worth during my hospital stays. They are two important aspects that mean so much to me and Park House gave them back during my first stay, simply by treating me

as a guest – a normal person – while still providing the care I needed.

All of the staff go out of their way to ensure that a guest's time is as enjoyable as possible; they do not patronise in any way.

The hotel, part of the Royal Estate Sandringham and given to Leonard Cheshire in 1983, is set in beautiful grounds. As well as offering excellent accommodation with all the necessary equipment, there is first-class cuisine.

On booking, a simple questionnaire gives the hotel care manager the necessary information to ensure the correct care and equipment, if needed, is in place.

Room prices are similar to most hotels but the cost of the care is added. Many guests there get financial support



Peace and quiet: Park House treats guests with respect

from their local authorities or other charities.

The hotel has a range of activities, including carpet bowls, quizzes, films, beetle drives and live music by talented local musicians.

Excursions are available in the afternoons to places as far afield as the Norfolk Broads. Shopping trips to King's Lynn are also possible.

Special activity weeks are provided, offering guests the chance to enjoy painting, crafts, gardening and bird-watching. If you like Park House enough, you can also book over Valentine's Day, Christmas and New Year.

Park House offers a break that is both enjoyable and sociable – with the chance to meet people from all walks of

'All of the staff go out of their way to ensure that a guest's time is as enjoyable as possible; they do not patronise in any way'

life. My wife and I have spent many happy weeks there and have made many friends during our stays. We look forward to many more happy breaks.

• Tel: 01485 543 000,
www.parkhousehotel.org.uk

Margaret and Joseph Shelley recharged their batteries in the comfort of Bridge House, Dawlish

I thought places where you could rest and recuperate were in the distant past, so was delighted when my husband Joseph found and booked a break at Bridge House, Dawlish, following an operation he had.

Visiting the house offered a great way to spend quality time together in relaxing and interesting surroundings, with nurses on hand if you need them.

Staff were helpful from the time we arrived. While our luggage was taken to our room, we tucked into tea and biscuits. Our bedroom was spacious and spring-like, with yellow walls and duvets, and our windows overlooking daffodils and primroses.

The house is wheelchair friendly. Motorised wheelchairs can be hired, but should be booked in advance, and you can hire other equipment from nearby Dawlish.

It's easy to make friends at Bridge House and the fact that TVs are located in the lounges, not the bedrooms, helps get you out and about. There is also an indoor games area and bar.

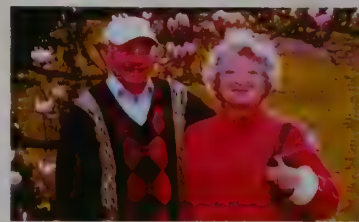
In a subtle act of social engineering, couples and singles are mixed in the dining room. Soon the room hums with conversation and laughter.

The food was good – there are plenty of roasts, grills and pies – and staff were eager to provide for guests with dietary requirements. You can also order packed lunches for days out, of which there are many possibilities, from the local seafront to Dartmoor.

Buckfast Abbey is a must, where the monks bake scones for delicious cream teas.

But it is relaxing back at the house and you may even bump into the friendly ghost – Lillie Langtry, who had an affair with King Edward VII.

• Tel: 01626 863 303,
www.rch.org.uk



Country retreat: The Shelleys enjoyed the spring atmosphere



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Stable life

Rachel Flint, 17, loves the British countryside for holidays but wants added adventure, so a Hertfordshire break surrounded by horses seemed the ideal solution for a family holiday



Although only a short distance from Hertford town centre, Petasfield Stables holiday cottages have great accessible rooms in a beautiful country setting, but best of all there is a riding school next door.

I am a wheelchair user and first went to Petasfield when it opened last Easter with my mum, dad, brother Simon and dog Cleo. I found that the owner Helen was as helpful about making sure I could enjoy the riding school that she runs, as she was ensuring my access needs were met in the

cottage we stayed in.

Guests can take part in riding lessons and stable management courses, costing between £17 and £30. Simon took some riding lessons and thoroughly enjoyed them.

Disabled people may be able to ride and are assessed on an individual basis but I opted for carriage riding that is aimed at wheelchair users – although everybody can try it for free.

I had never done this before. It was thrilling as we trotted down the lanes and I was able to see what was behind the hedgerows, such as cattle

grazing and farmers working in fields – it made such a change.

There are many other interesting tourist attractions nearby, including Paradise Wildlife Park at nearby Broxbourne. As a special surprise, a colleague of my dad arranged a VIP pass for us, meaning I was allowed behind the scenes and was thrilled to be able to tickle a tapir and stroke a snake. It is certainly well worth a visit and a day out the whole family can enjoy.

'It was thrilling as we trotted down the lanes'

But there is plenty to see back at the cottages. The one we stayed in has a large patio outside with garden furniture overlooking a beautiful wildflower and sensory garden.

There are a lot of birds and wildlife around and some of the horses graze in the field next door to the garden.



Rural rider: Rachel Flint with her family and cottage owners

The area is private, which means Cleo is free to enjoy the sunshine, but if you do not have a dog of your own you can always play with the three friendly ones that Petasfield owns. Ben, a Jack Russell, is my favourite. Most days he sat on my lap for hours and enjoyed all the attention, not to mention the doggy treats.

The cottages themselves are also great, with all the equipment you need.

We decided that Petasfield's Broadwater cottage best suited our need for family space in the living area. Equipped with a bed settee, television, stereo, dining furniture and a fully fitted kitchen with electric sink and hob riser, no attention to detail has been spared. The cottage

has one bedroom containing beds that can be changed from singles into a double and there is a large comfortable sofa bed in the living room.

There is also a spacious wet room and since our second visit, in May last year, a laundry room has been added. Everyone there has made us most welcome. There is a very friendly atmosphere and nothing is too much trouble, but most of all, I love being so close to the horses and watching them being fed in the fields.

** A week-long stay at Petasfield is priced between £300 and £450 depending on the time of year. For more information, tel: 01992 504 201, www.petasfieldcottages.co.uk*

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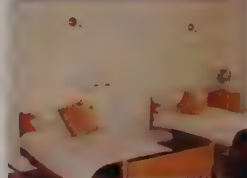
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Travel aids

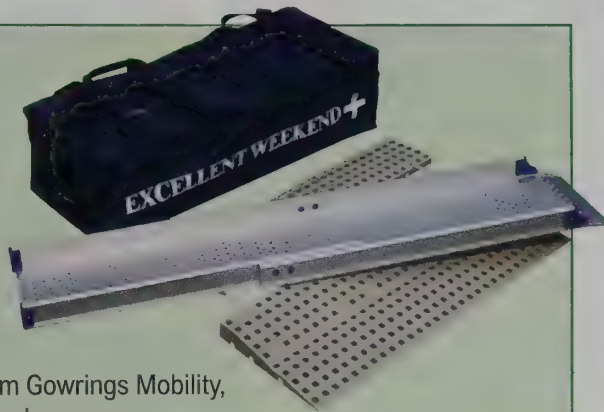
If you fancy taking a break close to home this year, chances are you will travel by car. Motoring correspondent Helen Smith offers ideas on making your trips as easy as possible.

RAMP FOR THE ROAD

What? The Flexiloc Ramp Kit – Weekend Plus can easily fit into the boot of a car and can be used to make a variety of ramps of different shapes and sizes, which is great if you do not know what sort of access problems you are going to meet. The ramp kit consists of polyurethane tiles that interlock together and the Weekend Plus kit also contains a pair of telescopic ramps.

How much? From £35

Where? The Flexiloc Ramp Kits can be purchased from Gowrings Mobility, tel: Lo-Call 0845 608 8020, www.gowringsmobility.co.uk



TROUBLE-FREE TRACKER

What? Car Navigation system. To avoid the frustrations of getting lost in a place you don't know a navigation system is a must have. There are

now absolutely loads to

choose from but there are two I particularly like – The Magellan Roadmate 300 and the Navman iCN 320. Both of them have nice big buttons and are easy to use – well they seemed it in Halfords when I tested them out. The Magellan is more for people who travel further afield as it will also guide you through major European roads and motorways.

How much? In-store the Navman iCN 320 is £169.99 and the Magellan Roadmate 300 is £299.99, but discounts are available if you order online.

Where? Halfords, tel: 0870 870 8810, www.halfords.com



Gowrings Mobility UK Road Atlas

The Essential Parking and Motoring Guide for Blue Badge Holders



ATLAS ON ACCESS

What? The Gowrings Mobility UK Road Atlas contains both national road maps and more detailed street maps of 65 city centres. Unlike other atlases, this one contains useful information for disabled people such as parking for Blue Badge holders, accessible car parks and petrol stations, tourist information centres, beaches, toilets and accommodation as well as Shopmobility locations.

How much? £12.99, but if you buy directly from Gowrings Mobility it costs £12 only

Where? All good bookshops or contact Gowrings Mobility, tel: Lo-Call 0845 608 8020, www.gowringsmobility.co.uk
* For your chance to win a copy, see page 47.

TWINS ON BOARD

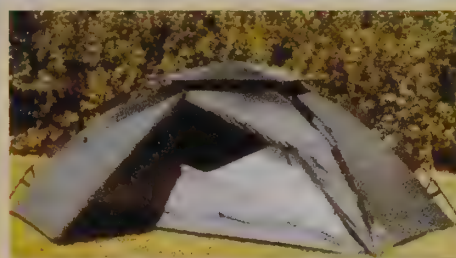


SUN SCREEN

What? Car sun shades and blinds. These can either be used to protect passengers from the sun or to keep your car cool once you have stopped. There are lots to choose from but I like the shades from TSL products on which you can have your own design or logo printed. There are also a variety of other designs if you do not want to think of your own.

How much? Prices start from £2.95 for a car roller sun blind.

Where? TSL products, tel: freephone 0800 949 6051, www.tsl-products.co.uk



TWO-MINUTE TENT

What? The HT-03 Bowland Umbrella system quick erect tent can be put up quickly and easily with the minimum of fuss. The flysheet, inner tent and frame are pre-assembled and the tent is put up just like an umbrella in a matter of minutes. It sleeps two people and weighs just 3.5kg, so is ideal for carrying in the boot of a car.

How much? £94.95

Where? Calamander, tel: 01874 63666, www.calamander.co.uk/camping/tents

CANINE COOLER



What? Finding fresh water on a car journey for your assistance dog can sometimes be difficult but with an Aquabowl it need never be a problem. This dog bowl can be filled with water before you leave home and then you can let a bit out at a time. It comes in a choice of two or four-litre sizes. They are not cheap, but neither is bottled water at service stations.

How much? Two-litre bowl £12.50, four-litre bowl £17.50.

Where? Canine Concepts, tel: 01582 402 502, www.canineconcepts.co.uk



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PUNCTURE PACK

What? If your scooter or wheelchair has pneumatic tyres it is a good idea to have a small repair kit in your car containing the items necessary to change a flat. Most bicycle repair shops sell compact repair kits, but I like the Innovations tyre repair cartridge from Wiggle as unlike some I've seen it also contains tyre levers. The kit contains: two 20mm round patches, four 25mm round patches, two 24 x 35mm patches, 8ml of vulcanising glue, a strip of sand paper and two nylon tyre levers.

How much? £2.99

Where? Wiggle, www.wiggle.co.uk



Ride of your life

PICTURES: SAM JEFFREY

In my bachelor days, I spent much time exploring the mountains, lochs and streams of the Scottish Highlands. My rural adventures ended in 1979 when I became a wheelchair user, but thanks to Land Rover I have been able to return to the hills.

My first time behind the wheel of a Land Rover made a huge impression on me; so much so that driving the sturdy 4x4s has become an important part of my life.

It must have been that first experience that left me with a burning desire to drive off-road

more, sleep in the car and take it fishing

Over the past decade I have owned a string of Land Rovers, all of which have been adapted with hand controls for the accelerator and brake. My current Defender 110 has an electronic clutch added. Such is my love affair with the 'Rover that I dream of owning more than one. Alas, money does not stretch far these days, thanks to the "kippers factor" – kids in parents' pockets eroding retirement savings.

Those new to the world of Land Rover are often daunted

or confused by what they can offer, which is where training runs at a Driving Experience centre come in useful.

Every new Land Rover sold comes with a complimentary half-day session at one of the nine Driving Experience centres around the country. But even if you have not bought a new vehicle, anyone can book a course – from a half-day introduction through to specialist courses covering winching, towing and expedition skills. The courses are a great way for potential buyers to see what the vehicles

have to offer and are also ideal presents for people who love driving and the outdoors.

I was interested to find out whether the Driving Experience centres were able to provide for disabled people – particularly after the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act – and chose the Yorkshire centre for my course.

The majestic Dales with the peaks of Pen-y-Ghent, Wharfedale and Ingleborough provide the backdrop to the centre. The testing courses, laid out across 1,200 acres of the Coniston Hall Estate, offer most

They're powerful, fun to drive, make the countryside accessible and they're available on Motability – no wonder more disabled drivers than ever are buying Land Rovers. Andrew Jeffrey visits an off-road centre to discover more

terrain conditions that a Land Rover will encounter in Britain.

Eager to investigate the differences between my own Discovery 2 and its new sibling, I tried out a Discovery 3, using my trusted Lynx hand controls, which clamp onto any automatic car.

As a company, Land Rover has always had a positive corporate attitude and I was pleased to see this extended to welcoming disabled people. When I approached the Yorkshire centre and told them I was a disabled driver, there were no awkward questions or lengthy interviews. Instead I was asked: "How soon would you like to come?" Managers recognise that one disabled person's needs are not the same as the next and they offer appropriately qualified instructors. Mine was Paul Sinkinson.

The Yorkshire centre is fairly easy to get around in a wheelchair. The log cabin-style driving centre offices and lecture room are accessed from a low ramp. There was also a ramp for side-level entry to any door of the adapted Discovery. The only current problem is that wheelchair users have to use the loos at the Coniston Hotel, 300 yards from the driving centre office.

My session started with an introductory talk in the classroom to demystify the otherwise dark art of off-road driving and the basic mechanical functions of Land Rovers. The classroom bit was an eye-opener. Although I have driven them for years, I was surprised how much I still had to learn about what goes on behind the exterior.

Lessons and coffee finished,

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it was out onto the driving course. At that point I thought the drive would be no problem, but the first few manoeuvres destroyed that myth. As I drove off in Paul's Discovery, he said: "I'll give you a few surprises as to what these vehicles are capable of today, so we'll be hitting some hills that I know are possible but I reckon you'll think aren't achievable."

He was right. I soon had a far clearer understanding of angles of descent and ascent, river driving, boulder negotiating and, perhaps most importantly, terrain and driving judgement.

There were a few surprises, a few moments of blind faith, and a few that had my jaw dropping to the gear lever. Unless you've done it, it's hard to imagine how a Land Rover is able to take you over a ridge, from which your only view is the sky, to the bottom of a 45 degree mud-caked hill with just the steering wheel being touched – it really is

WHAT IT COSTS

If you do not have the Land Rover free introductory offer, the Yorkshire centre charges:

Introductory half-day course	£150
Level one, day course	£250
Level two, day course	£300
Trailer handling, day course	£250
Specialist one-day course	£250
Specialist two-day course	£500

There are a number of other tailor-made course options.

For more information, tel: 0870 264 4459 or email: info@lre3.co.uk

To find about other centres tel: 0800 110 110 or visit www.landrover.com

mechanical genius.

Once I gained confidence in what the vehicle could do, driving over much of the course became relatively easy. It is always important, though, not to become complacent when driving off-road – an inch here or centimetre there in the wrong direction, and you could find yourself calling for winch retrieval.

Despite Land Rover's fantastic free half-day session, that comes with all new purchases, only 0.4 per cent of Motability scheme Land Rover purchasers have taken up the offer since its inception. I find this amazing – think of what can be learnt, let alone the fun.

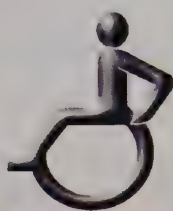
Over the next few months, Land Rover hope to be able to offer the complete experience across all the centres. With expert guidance from the centres' instructors, disabled drivers could be enjoying previously inaccessible countryside.

As for the vehicle itself, the Discovery 3 is, without doubt, the best I have ever driven – as well as one of the biggest: wheelchair, wife, three teenage boys and the Irish Wolfhound fitted in with ease. There are numerous features that make light work for people with a variety of impairments, many of which are controlled by its awesome electronic control system, which guides everything from the hill decent control to the drinks cooler box. For power, freedom and reliability, the Land Rover is a wonderful vehicle and for the sheer excitement of the experience I recommend the off-road courses immensely. If you get the chance, book yourself on one.

• *There are currently 31 Land Rover models on the Motability scheme, tel: 0845 456 4566, www.motability.co.uk*



Journey of Discovery: (from above clockwise) Andrew, son Sam and trainer Paul before setting out; ramp training; forest driving and off-road exercises.



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Dear Rachel

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- bereavement
- personal problems
- advice and support

Rachel Wilson, who is disabled herself, has spent many years advising on disability matters. Write to her at *Disability Now*, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW or email your problem to editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



Art and about

I am interested in art, particularly for disabled people. I would like to make new friends but don't know where to start – sometimes I feel as if I am the only person interested in art. Can you tell me of any groups I could join? I would also like information on organisations for artists who paint with their mouth or feet as I would like to buy works from these artists.

Edward, Cardiff

Although you say you are interested in art specifically for disabled people, since you also want to make friends it may be worth contacting a local college to see if they are running art courses. Joining one of these will help you meet people with similar interests and you'll feel less isolated. If you are interested in art with a disability emphasis, then a good place to start is your local disability arts group, Disability Arts Cymru.

For information on the work

of artists who use their mouth or feet, try the Mouth and Foot Painters Association. They offer support and information for artists as well as advice on where you can buy members' work.

● *Mouth and Foot Painting Artists*, tel: 020 7229 4491, www.mfpa.co.uk

● *Disability Arts Cymru*, tel/textphone: 02920 551 040 www.dacymru.com

Hire nightmare

I am a disabled driver with a car featuring hand controls. Following a recent accident, I had to hire a car and was appalled at the lack of understanding among car hire companies over my needs. What should I do if I ever need a hire car again?

Barbara, Essex

Currently, the provision of a hire car is considered to be the "provision of a vehicle", and as such is exempt from the Disability Discrimination Act. This exemption will be lifted from 4 December this year, but

until then, you will not be able to legally challenge car hire firms that appear to be discriminating against you.

That said, firms that provide basic hand controls do exist, including big hire companies like Avis, Hertz and Thrifty. To get an adapted vehicle from them you'll have to give at least 48 hours' notice and you'll also have to pay extra for the hand controls (Avis recently charged £70 for fitting the controls and a daily charge afterwards of £10).

If your adaptation needs are more complex, then there are other companies that can help, including Adapted Vehicle Hire, which supplies cars with hand controls to both individuals and hire companies.

I hope that after December the number of companies providing such vehicles will increase and should the need for a replacement vehicle arise again, it will prove much less frustrating.

● *Adapted Vehicle Hire*, 43-49 Gunnersbury Lane, London W3 8ED, tel: 0845 257 1670

Forced into home

I am 59, have cerebral palsy and try to live independently. However, after one of my carers left recently, my social worker made me move into a care home. I am a member of several disability groups, including my local centre for independent living and I have their support. I try to remain independent, but it is difficult when I'm in a home with staff I am not happy with.

Jane, Derby

It is vital that you can be supported in working with your social worker to get back home with regular and consistent support as soon as possible. It is good that you are supported by user-organisations – this could help your cause.

If you are unhappy about the way social services are managing your care, you can ask anyone you trust to act as an advocate for you. Both the home you are in and your social worker need to appreciate how this move has made you feel. You have the right to make a complaint and if you are unhappy about the way you have been treated in the nursing home, you can also contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection, which is responsible for monitoring care standards amongst care providers. The National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL) may also be able to help.

● *Commission for Social Care Inspection*, tel: 020 7979 2000, www.csci.org.uk

● *NCIL*, tel: 0207 587 1663, textphone: 0207 587 1177, email: info@ncil.org.uk, www.ncil.org.uk

Two rooms at the Inn

I recently booked a room at a Holiday Inn for my carer and I. I'm not a wheelchair user but do have mobility problems so I asked about an accessible room. I was told that the hotel only had accessible rooms with double beds and that if I wasn't willing to share a bed I would have to book – and pay for – two rooms.

Shortly after this, I received a second phone call from them telling me that if a disabled customer needs a room for a carer then the second room is not charged for. This obviously made things cheaper so I was

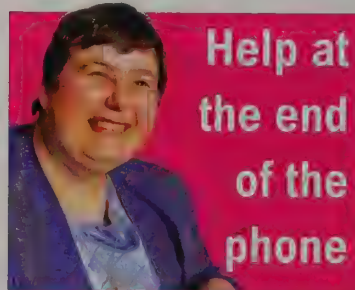
pleased, but I was surprised – especially after we'd been told we would have to book two rooms. Why did the company apparently change their approach to me?

Claire, by email

My guess is that the first person you spoke to was unaware of the Holiday Inn's policy towards disabled guests and I am pleased to see that the hotel corrected their mistake.

Hotels (like other service providers) are not allowed to pass on the costs of adjustments they make for disabled customers and if a guest's impairment means they need a room to accommodate an assistant, then they should not be penalised by being asked to meet the "extra" cost of the second room.

It seems that they remembered this by the time of their second phone call.



Help at the end of the phone

DN's telephone counsellor Lin Berwick gives disabled people and carers advice and support on personal and spiritual problems. Disabled herself, Lin is a psycho-therapeutic counsellor and Methodist local preacher, with a postgraduate diploma in homeopathic medicine. If you have something you need to discuss in confidence, talk to her on Mondays 6pm-10pm and Thursdays 1pm-5pm, tel: 01787 882 111.

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ASK THE READERS

I have a disabled parking bay outside my house allocated by the council. The problem is that other disabled people keep using it, so I can rarely park near my home. The council says it can do nothing and I am too afraid to challenge people myself. What can I do?

Contact the council

Your first step should be to contact the council. Different councils operate different parking policies and this will affect what you may be entitled to. Some councils may be willing to personalise your parking space, either with on-street markings or with adjacent signage (see left). If they can do this, it should dissuade others from using your spot. David, Stoke Newington

Pave your garden

Contact the council, explain that the current situation is not working and see if your garden can be converted into your own driveway. If there is space for this to be done, it may be possible to claim a Disabled Facilities Grant for the work to be carried out. Mark Baggeley, director, Choices and Rights Disability Coalition, Hull and East Riding Centre for Independent Living

Write to your MP

I have the same problem, and it will get worse when the congestion zone is extended in London. If you're lucky, your



council will provide a legal personalised disabled bay, but many don't – they can't be bothered making out traffic orders as it takes time and money. Write to your MP to tell them of your problem. Nothing changes for the better by itself. Allen, London

Space is not yours

There's very little you can do. I also have a bay outside my house – my street is in a residents only parking zone – and mine has a pole with signage, which means it's enforceable; anyone without a badge will get a ticket. The problem is that anyone with a Blue Badge from any street can use the bay. I am lucky because my neighbours respect my needs for the bay, but I have had the odd "Blue Badge shopper" use it

and they are entitled to do so. My council told me when I first applied for a bay that it would never be exclusively mine. You will have to muster up the courage to explain to other drivers why you would prefer them to park elsewhere and hope they understand – or grit your teeth I'm afraid. Jilly, North West

Clamp your friends

Get your friends to park in the space and then put a fake clamp on their car. After a while, people will think that they will get clamped too if they park there. Ian Watkins, Buckingham, Bucks

NEXT MONTH'S QUESTION:

"I have had problems asking staff to serve me outside at petrol stations. What techniques can I use to help persuade them and what action can I take if they won't help?" Send your answers and your own questions to "Ask the readers" at the usual postal address or by email at: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

SIMON SAYS

Old, gay and disabled

Valentine's Day is coming round again. Will you be celebrating? Unfortunately, many disabled people won't be out with a special someone. Dating remains an area in which we lag behind our non-disabled counterparts. Perhaps this is the year that we should try and get out there more.

Geoff wrote to DN as a gay senior citizen who has been disabled since his early teens. He says he finds meeting people "doubly difficult" as a result.

On the face of it, the dice may appear to be stacked against him. A number of my gay disabled clients have complained that the gay scene is "body fascist" – a term I don't like much, but one which emphasises one of the difficulties many disabled gay men face in finding a partner.

Like most stereotypes, this is only partially true. But, for people like Geoff, finding sexually fulfilling relationships can be a frustrating game of chance. Personal columns in *Gay Times* and elsewhere present opportunities, but also risks. The age factor needn't, however, be considered a problem. Older disabled people often forget what they have to offer in terms of experience, maturity and just plain good company. Besides, since when was sexiness and the need for intimacy the sole preserve of the young?

In the end, dating is a numbers game. The more people you contact, the more chance you have of finding a partner. And it's easier than ever. The internet has much to offer. Flirting online is not physically exhausting and people, while not always genuine, are often more honest and open. With the normal precautions we would take on any blind date, the internet offers one way to sort the lucky possibles from those who aren't up to the mark.

So if you are looking for a new Valentine this month, experiment with something different – not just an anonymous card or a bunch of flowers. If you're older and single, why not take advantage of the newest of technologies and become a "silver surfer", with a mission to get out there, both in cyberspace and in real life?

Send your relationship questions to "Simon says" at the usual postal address or by email at: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

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For further information, FREE Brochure pack or to arrange a demonstration please contact Philip Beecham, Mike Jones, Simon Fletcher or David Connor (New Versa Enquiries), Phil Hawkins (Used Versa Specialist).

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Preventing falls

There are many things you can do to reduce the risk of falling at home. Lucy Andrews gives you practical advice on staying safe and offers ideas on products that can help

TAKING CARE

To avoid falling, you should:

- Make sure lighting is adequate.
- Remove anything that can be a tripping hazard, such as loose rugs, trailing flex.
- Wear sensible, well fitting shoes and clothing that gives you room to move. Avoid longer garments that can trail when you go up or down stairs.
- Recognise your own limitations – do not hurry or try to do things when you are too tired. Do not attempt things that are better left for when you have someone to help you.
- If you do have a fall, do not hurry to get up. Check that you have not injured yourself, then slowly roll onto your hands and knees and get up to standing in stages. If you can't get up by yourself, there is equipment that can help.

PULLING POWER

What? A wall-fixed grab rail can provide a firm support to pull up on. To give a progression of handholds, have a sequence of three horizontal rails fixed in parallel up the wall. If you prefer something that can be tucked away, look at the Extend-a-hand Grab Bar that lowers down when not required, available in four lengths.

How much? From £43.

Where? Homecraft Rolyan, tel: 08702 423 305, www.homecraft-rolyan.com



CUSHION COMFORT

What? Lifting cushions are inflatable cushions that lie reasonably flat to the floor when deflated, and on the push of a button inflate to lift the user up into a sitting position. They should be used with an assistant to help the user roll or shuffle into a central position on the cushion and then to give steadying support as the cushion inflates. The Mangar Elk is battery powered and has a user capacity of 450kg. The Marcon Air lift is mains powered and includes a section at the back that inflates first to help bring you up into a sitting position on the floor, capacity 127kg. Both lift to a similar height of around 56cm.

How much? Elk £850, Air Lift £471.

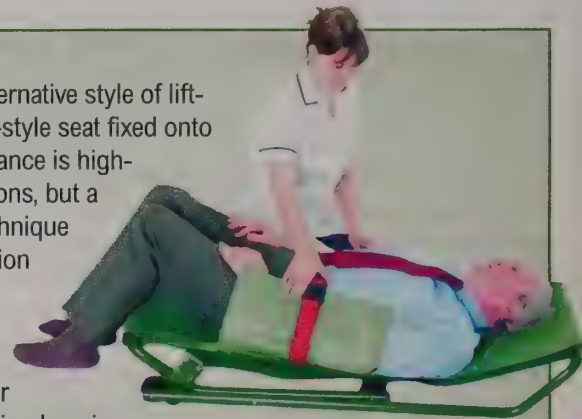
Where? Mangar International Ltd, tel: 01544 267 674, www.mangar.co.uk and Marcon Bed Elevators, tel: 01306 628 164, www.marcon-uk.fsbusiness.co.uk

CHAIR LIFT

What? The Pick-me-up is an alternative style of lifting chair that has a fabric sling-style seat fixed onto an X-shaped frame. Floor clearance is higher than for the inflatable cushions, but a similar rolling technique is used to position the user on the seat. An assistant then winches the user up from a low, reclined position to a higher sitting position. User capacity is 130kg.

How much? £450

Where? Homecraft Rolyan, tel: 0870 242 3305, www.homecraft-rolyan.com



ALARM AID

What? The Fallcall Trigger is an emergency alarm that automatically triggers when the person wearing the device falls over. The emergency radio signal can be sent short distance to a distress alarm that makes a loud noise, or long distance to the Guardian Speech Dialler that can dial four pre-programmed telephone numbers until the call is answered.

How much? With distress alarm from £200, with speech dialler £320. As a cheaper option, the supplier can modify a wireless door chime – the bell push becomes the trigger and the door chime becomes the alert to call for help within the home environment.

Where? TFC, tel: 01271 327 207, www.fallcall.co.uk

PERSONAL TOUCH

What? Telecare smart sensors offer an extension to community alarm systems – emergency alarms that link through to a 24-hour call centre. Centre staff keep essential details of the caller and can give reassurance and take appropriate action such as contacting key holders or the emergency services. Systems are tailored to meet personal needs and can help prevent falls by monitoring and automating the home environment, as well as calling for help should a need arise, by sending an alert through to the call centre. Automatic lighting, medication reminders, heart and respiratory monitors, movement monitors and fall detectors can all be included in a telecare package.

How much? Prices vary. Systems can be bought or rented privately. Some social services may be able to offer telecare sensors as an extension of the community alarms they currently provide.

Where? Contact the Telecare Services Association, tel: 01634 846 209, www.asap-uk.org

GOT AN EQUIPMENT QUESTION?

Lucy Andrews is a senior advisor at the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF). If you have a question on equipment for Lucy please email editor@disabilitynow.org.uk or post it to the usual address. The DLF helpline is open Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm, and provides information and advice on choosing and using equipment. Contact the helpline on 0845 130 9177 or email: advice@dlf.org.uk



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TV



You must have had your head in a bucket for the last month if you haven't noticed the avalanche of fat shows on the telly since Christmas.

The New Year obesityfest warned of plagues of unchecked flesh taking over the country with ITV1's *My Child Can't Stop Eating: Real Families* (another programme about Prader-Willi syndrome), *Gillian McKeith's New Year Detox* (C4) and *Larger Than Life – Eating Themselves To Death*, a show on Five featuring a man in his thirties, weighing 55 stone, who died during the making of the programme. His belly was the size of a small sofa. All this was on Monday and Tuesday of the first week of January.

On Wednesday, Lorraine Kelly hosted ITV1's *SuperSlim Me: Best and Worst Diets*, where the "best" diet was the Cambridge Total Food Replacement Diet. This was followed by *Dying To Be Thin: The Real Story* (BBC1) presented by whippet-like Fiona Bruce, which told us everything we needed to know about gastric banding – a medical procedure that reduces a person's food intake by inserting a small pouch into the upper part of the stomach. The general consensus was not to do it.

Thursday's offering on Five was *The Diet Doctors Inside and Out*, a new six-parter that helped an 18 stone mother to get slim.

Week two of the New Year brought us ITV1's *Supersize Surgery* (more gastric banding), *Celebrity Fit Club* and the ferret-like Gillian McKeith's *You Are What You Eat* (C4). I don't know about you, but I feel as though I could perform a gastric banding operation myself now.

In between wall-to-wall panic over the obesity pandemic, ITV1 screened *Teenage Tourettes Camp*, which made Gordon Ramsay look like a vicar. For my money though, it should have been called *Teenage Tantrum Camp*.

BBC1's *ONE Life: Being Brian Harvey* wondered whether the former pop star will ever walk again after bizarrely running himself over with his Mercedes.

Jane Shepherd

★★★★ excellent
★★★★ very good ★★★ good
★★ OK ★ poor

Theatre



Thalidomide!!: A Musical



Following success at last year's festivals and a sell-out run at the Battersea Arts Centre, Mat Fraser's *Thalidomide!!: A Musical* is returning. The clever, funny and deliberately non-PC show tells the story of a man with very short arms looking for love in a world obsessed by physical perfection. Fraser writes, composes and stars in the show, which tells the serious story of the Thalidomide scandal alongside a series of hilarious



Painful birth: Mat Fraser and Anna Winslet get theatrical

song and dance routines.

Fraser plays Glyn and Anna Winslet (sister of Kate) plays Katie, his love interest. "Yes I'll love him without any qualms, he'll be my guy and I'll be his arms!", she sings.

The show charts their relationship, from lovestruck schoolchildren to adulthood, highlighting the mishaps along the way. At the same time, we are shown how damning facts about Thalidomide were swept

under the carpet by the medical teams behind the notorious pregnancy drug.

Although there is a serious message here, the song and dance routines, which are cleverly put together, never fail to raise a laugh, contributing to an inspiring and thought-provoking show. The music is effective too – featuring a range of musical styles, from ska to country and western.

Entertaining, witty and revealing, the show really packs a punch, providing an ideal showcase for Fraser's many talents.

● Battersea Arts Centre, 31 January - 13 February, tel: 020 7223 2223, www.bac.org.uk

Lucy Howard

Film



Walk the Line



Walk the Line is a film biography of country singer Johnny Cash. In it, we follow the life of Cash (Joaquin Phoenix, right) from his early days, living in poverty with his abusive father. In the deeply religious household, the young Cash's only salvation comes through playing country music.

The film charts the singer's life as he moves to Germany and then back to the USA,

where he marries his early sweetheart, who wants him to live a conventional lifestyle as a salesman. But Cash wants to be a singer and through sheer single-mindedness, he develops his talents before performing for the legendary Sam Phillips, the man who discovered Elvis.

If music is Cash's first love, June Carter (Reese Witherspoon), is his second. She joins him on tour and instantly wins him over – she is beautiful, sassy and strong. When Cash leaves his first wife after becoming too reliant on drink and amphetamines, Carter remains loyal to him.



She is his rock and whenever he strays, she is there for support.

Witherspoon, like Phoenix, does all her own singing and is utterly charismatic, illuminating the screen. Eventually, after sustained wooing, they marry, and their partnership becomes one of

the most stable in the musical fraternity.

Cash's life was punctuated by periods of severe drug and alcohol abuse, yet he survived long enough to become a country music legend.

In his later life, he had Shy-Drager, a condition similar to Parkinson's. He died in 2003 aged 71, from complications from diabetes.

The film, directed by James Mangold, is an enjoyable summation of an important figure in contemporary music, which, like his songs, moves along at a fair old pace.

Michael Shamash

What's on



Film

Murderball (DN, November 2005), will be available on DVD this month. The high-octane documentary, which we gave three thumbs up, follows the American and Canadian quadriplegic rugby teams as they prepare for the 2004 Paralympics.

● For your chance to win a copy, see page 47

Theatre

Alison Moyet and Dawn French play sisters in *Smaller*, which tells the story of a schoolteacher caring for her disabled mother. The show, directed by Kathy Burke, will tour before opening in London's Lyric theatre on 28 March. It will be on at Theatre Royal in Bath from 15-18 February, with a signed performance on 18 February.

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Sports

There will be a family splash session at **Blackwater Leisure Centre** in Maldon on 11 February. There are various pools, underwater jets and two flume rides. *Free, but booking required.* Tel: 01621 875 738, www.maldon.gov.uk

Cerebral Palsy Sport is holding a multi-sports development day on 26 February at Leisure World in Colchester. The day will include athletics, football and boccia. £5. Tel: 0115 925 7027, email: junior@cpsport.org

The Peepul Centre in Leicester has opened a fitness and sports facility. The mixed gym is fully accessible, and classes include aerobics and yoga. There will also soon be a health and holistic therapy centre. *Membership from £21 per month.* Tel: 0116 266 7673, www.peepulcentre.com

Mencap Sport is inviting entrants for the national athletics championships, to be held in June. Deadline: 26 May. Tel: 01924 234 912, email: kathy.anstey@mencap.org.uk

Publications

The National Library for the Blind (NLB) has teamed up with the Good Gifts Catalogue to offer present ideas in time for Valentine's Day. Gifts include Braille and large print books. Tel: 0161 355 2044, www.goodgifts.org

Nottingham Rehab Supplies have a products catalogue, the latest edition of which includes over 500 new products from daily living aids to games. Tel: 0845 606 0911, www.mrs-uk.co.uk

Personal Best: Ten lessons to help you achieve your full potential, by Paralympian Marc Woods, explores how to challenge setbacks and adversity and set goals and achieve your aims. *Capstone Publishing*, £9.99. Email: cs-books@wiley.co.uk, www.wiley-europe.com

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) has produced a DVD titled *Go for It!* to raise awareness of deafness in secondary schools in Scotland. The DVD features games focusing on lip-reading and sign language and includes a copy of the NDCS fingerspelling card. Tel: 0141 248 2429, www.ndcs.org.uk

What's On

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association is celebrating its 75th anniversary, and is launching an interactive exhibition titled *Moving Forward Together*, which tells the history of guide dogs. It will be at the Isle of Dogs until 20 February, before touring. There will be three-dimensional, touch sensitive and audio exhibits. Tel: 0870 600 23 23, www.guidedogs.org.uk

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BETWEEN THE SHEETS

Websites

Able 2 covers disability-related stories and entertainment, including events such as Live8 and the Brits, and has a gig guide. See www.able2uk.com

The National Centre for Young People with Epilepsy (NCYPE) has revamped its website, which includes information on education, health, volunteering and fundraising. See www.ncype.org.uk

Transport for London (TfL) is running a consultation on its Disability Equality Scheme, which outlines plans to make journeys more accessible and comfortable. The feedback received will be used to finalise the scheme and help improve services. There is a questionnaire as part of the consultation. Deadline: mid-March. To have your say, tel: 020 7126 4601, email: des@tfl.gov.uk, www.tfl.gov.uk/des

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RENAULT KANGOO 1.2 16 valve, Forest Green, 2002, 2k miles. Wheelchair accessible vehicle with lowered floor, ramp in rear, wheelchair securing system, 1 fixed rear seat with seatbelt. Remote central locking, RDS radio, only one owner from new, £8,250. Tel: 01362 695562 (Dereham, Norfolk) or mobile: 07900 980813.

FIAT FIORINO 1.4 S reg with electric winch, fold down ramp, seats 4 plus wheelchair, 23k miles. One lady owner from new, full MOT, £3,250. Tel: 0121 328 9941 (Birmingham) or mob: 07971 558619.

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MERCEDES VITO 108CDI 2.2 diesel, charcoal grey, reg 2002, MOT until March 2006. Widnes Car Centre conversion incl removable front passenger seat for wheelchair access with RICON rear access lift. 2 sunroofs, radio/CD player, only one owner

from new, 21k miles, in immaculate condition, asking £14,000 ono. Tel: 01772 861427 (Preston).

NISSAN PRAIRIE 2.0 1989, F reg, 113k miles, blue. With Brotherwood conversion incl lowered floor with rear ramp, carries 5 including wheelchair (2 rear seats). Recent MOT, in good condition, fsh, £1,200 ono. Tel: 01737 226027 (Reigate) or 07949 852493.

VW SHARAN CARAT 2.8 VR6 1996, auto, with Brotherwood high roof conversion. 80k, MOT until August. Good condition, fsh, £6,200. Tel: 01625 528358 (Cheshire).

Cont'd pg 42

• Documentary



BBC Documentary

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CHRYSLER VOYAGER 3.3, S reg (Nov end '98), 42k miles, auto. Constables conversion incl e/wheelchair and lift, carries 6 including wheelchair, hand controls, all electric: air con, cruise control, windows and retracting mirrors. 10 months' MOT, only one owner from new, fsh. Cost £30,000+ new, asking £8,750 ono. Tel: 01442 862088 (Hemel Hempstead).

CHAIRMAN FIAT FIORINO 1.7 Tdi, R reg (1998), red, 53k miles, with full Gowrings conversion which seats 4 plus wheelchair with fold down ramp. Pioneer CD player with 4 Kenwood speakers. Only one owner from new, in very good condition, full MOT which expires Oct 06, fsh, £1,600 ono. Tel: 0121 628 3706 (Birmingham).

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• Holidays (cont'd pg 31-32)

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PEUGEOT BOXER SWB 1.9 LTR DIESEL Date first registered: 13/04/1999, White, 5 seats, 2 owners, Good condition, 5 Speed manual, 98,000 miles, MOT until: 30/09/2006, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Non-Slip Flooring, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Short wheelbase, Side load door, Soft cord trimmed interior, Twin front passenger seat, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **£5,250**

RENAULT KANGOO 1.4 LTR PETROL Date first registered: 25/07/2002, White, 3 seats, As new condition, Automatic, 2,250 miles, MOT until: 28/07/2006, 5 door, A.B.S, Air Bag, Electric reels, Forward view front window for wheelchair occupant, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Immaculate condition inside and out, Non-Slip Flooring, One rear saloon seat, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Remote Central Locking, Full length factory fitted Sunroof, Twin Side Doors. **£9,250**

FIAT FIORINO 1.7 LTR DIESEL Date first registered: 25/08/2005, Red, 4 seats, 2 owners, Fair Condition, Manual, 46,000 miles, MOT until: 21/02/2006, 3 Door, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Large area side windows, Non-Slip Flooring, Radio/cassette player. **£1,850**

RENAULT MASTER SWB 2.2 LTR DIESEL Date first registered: 15/08/2001, Blue, 5 seats, Manual, 18,000 miles, Air Bag, Could take 2 wheelchairs, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Power Steering, Remote Central Locking, Side load door, Twin front passenger seat. **£9,700**

VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER SWB 2.5 TDI TURBO DIESEL Date first registered: 06/08/2001, Red, 5 seats, 24,000 miles, Automatic Transmission, Full width lightweight ramp, Hand controls, Electric park brake, Swivel base drivers seats, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Side load door, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **£10,500**

VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER SWB 2.5 TDI TURBO DIESEL Date first registered: 25/11/1998, Green, 4 seats, 42,000 miles, Automatic Transmission, Could take 2 wheelchairs, Electric Winch, Lowering rear air suspension, Power Steering, Rear Saloon Heater, Side load door, Single front passenger seat, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **£6,800**

VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER T4 1.9 LTR TURBO DIESEL Date first registered: 27/03/2000, Blue, 4 seats, Manual, 27,000 miles, RICON CLEARWAY electric wheelchair lift, Short wheelbase, Single front passenger seat, Could take 2 wheelchairs, Power Steering. **£8,995**

RENAULT KANGOO 1.6 LTR PETROL Date first registered: 14/11/2003, Green, 3 seats, 13,000 miles, 5 door, A.B.S, Air Bag, Automatic Transmission, Electric reels, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, Power Steering, Remote Central Locking, Electric Mirrors, Electric windows, Alloy wheels. **£11,300**

FIAT SCUDO COMBI 2.0 LTR JTD TURBO DIESEL Date first registered: 06/03/2003, Blue, 3 seats, Manual, 8,600 miles, 5 door, Air conditioning, Electric Mirrors, Electric reels, Electric windows, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Remote Central Locking, Single front passenger seat. **£12,350**

RENAULT KANGOO 1.5 LTR DIESEL Date first registered: 05/03/2003, Red, 3 seat, Manual, 17,000 miles, 5 door, Air Bag, Electric reels, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Remote Central Locking. **£9,700**

MANY MORE VEHICLES EXPECTED IN NEXT 2 WEEKS

Various Mini-Buses and Wheelchair access in stock
and ready to go. Phone for details

Citroen Dispatch 1.9 diesel, 'X' reg, chairman conversion, one owner, 27k, fsh, oxford blue, lowered floor, 4/5 seats & wheelchair, winch, ramp, electric belts, P.A.S. stereo etc. Nationwide demonstration, £6,995. Tel: 01948 860906 or 07966 468295. Trade.

Powerchairs Mobility Consultants
New and Nearly New, Electric Wheelchairs, 3 and 4 Wheel Scooters.
All models wanted and for sale.
Ring Free anytime
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Thinking of moving?
Call our gold award winning estate agency service on
08456 120 280
or visit our website

MFH Mobility Friendly Homes
mobilityfriendlyhomes.co.uk

• Recruitment (on page 43 to 46)

eastTHAMES

Diversity means more at East Thames

WE HAVE OPPORTUNITIES IN: ADMINISTRATION • CALL CENTRE • FINANCE • HOUSING • ICT • MAINTENANCE • HUMAN RESOURCES
PRESS & COMMUNICATIONS • YOUTH WORK • CARE & SUPPORT WORK • REGENERATION • SALES & MARKETING

At East Thames, our aim is very simple: to make a positive and lasting contribution to the diverse neighbourhoods in which we work.

With over 25 years of success, we have enjoyed impressive growth and now own or manage more than 12,500 homes throughout east London and Essex. Looking forward to our future, we plan to double in size over the next five years.

At East Thames, diversity is a real and tangible thing - not just a word. The variety of cultures within our geographical area means that we're part of one of the most diverse communities in the UK, a fact that's reflected in our workforce.

Ours is a forward-thinking organisation that provides care and quality, affordable housing. Our work is both challenging and rewarding, but the best thing about it is that, no matter what part you play at East Thames, you'll be contributing to the transformation of someone's life.

We rely on the talents of people across a wide range of fields, which means that whatever your skills, there's probably a role for you.

For further information about us and to apply for current vacancies, visit www.east-thames.co.uk

Alternatively you can telephone us on 020 8522 2000.

We welcome applications from people with disabilities, as they are currently under-represented in the Group. We are an equal opportunities employer.



MORE THAN A HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service

Visit our website at www.nottinghamcvs.co.uk

NCVS

Chief Executive

Salary in the region of £40,000 per annum + 5% pension contribution
37 hours per week

Do you have an understanding of the Voluntary and Community Sector, the policy environment it operates in and the challenges it faces?

We are seeking a new Chief Executive with significant senior management level experience and a sound track record of managing people and resources to ensure we retain our reputation for thinking ahead and developing innovative answers today for the opportunities and challenges our sector faces tomorrow.

We have a strong management team, a staff of 52, and we own the 5 storey Voluntary Action Centre which also provides office accommodation and meeting rooms for other local organisations. To succeed in this post you will have a strong commitment to NCVS' ethical values and be capable of being an effective advocate for the sector at the most senior level in a range of partnership settings. You will be enterprising, and a strategic thinker able to inspire and influence the thinking of others.

Nottingham is culturally diverse, the economic capital of the East Midlands, with a thriving shopping and cultural scene, but it also faces big challenges to overcome the underlying deprivation that makes Nottingham a tale of two cities.

One of the city's greatest assets is its large, vibrant community and voluntary sector. Their work will be vital to the future social, economic and cultural success of the city, but the sector faces its own challenges and pressures. Help us make sure the sector's potential is realised.

Closing date: 9:00am 13th February 2006

Interview date: 2nd March 2006 [to take up post in June 2006]

Nottingham Voluntary Action Centre, where you will be based, has wheelchair access and facilities for disabled people. NCVS is implementing a challenging Equality Action Plan and welcomes applications from all people and communities.

To receive more details and an application form (CV's will not be accepted) please contact the NCVS Helpline Tel: 0115 934 8400 between 9:30 am and 4:00 pm or email: helpdesk@nottinghamcvs.co.uk

• Sponsorship

>The LDA's diversity events sponsorship programme is being launched on 20 January 2006. There will now be one round of bidding for diversity sponsorship, which will cover all events from 1 May 2006 to 30 April 2007.

DIVERSITY EVENTS SPONSORSHIP

> Organisations and individuals seeking diversity event sponsorship should be from a diversity group, or be seeking to help those individuals from a diversity group in London.

Examples of events could include seminars, workshops, exhibitions, conferences and networking opportunities. Eligible events must be focused on helping to remove barriers to getting back into the labour market, giving advice on how to start a business, or helping to improve performance, or provide training for skills.

To apply, download an application form at: www.lda.gov.uk/diversitysponsorship, or email: diversitysponsorship@lda.gov.uk to request a copy. Alternatively write to:

Diversity Events Manager
London Development Agency
Devon House, 58-60 St Katharine's Way
London E1W 1JX

The deadline for completed submissions is:
2pm on 17 March 2006.

MAYOR OF LONDON

LONDON
DEVELOPMENT
AGENCY



Action Disability

Kensington & Chelsea
A Centre for Independent Living

Action Disability Kensington and Chelsea

ADKC, a local organisation of disabled people, are seeking to fill the following posts:

Head of Policy (Ref HOP/01)

(This Post is for a disabled person)

Salary scale PO1 £29,289 pa

35 hours per week

- To be responsible for Policy Development both internally and externally
- To promote inclusion in partnership with statutory, voluntary and business sector
- To support the organisation in achieving quality standards



LOTTERY FUNDED

Information Worker (Ref IW/01)

(This Post is for a disabled person)

Salary scale 5 £21,552 pa pro rata

21 hours per week

- To give information and advice to enable disabled people to live independently
- To provide support in disability related benefits
- To identify information needs of disabled people

PA to the Chief Executive (Ref PACE/02)

Salary scale 5 £ 21,552 pa

35 hours per week

- To support the work of the Chief Executive
- To be experienced in MS Office application
- To support the smooth running of the organisation

Policy & Consultation Administrator (Ref PCA/01)

Salary scale 4 £19,239 pa pro rata

17.5 hours per week

- To support the policy and consultation officer
- To organise consultation events
- To carry out research and surveys



LOTTERY FUNDED

Consultation & Self Advocacy Officer (Ref CO/01)

(This Post is for a disabled person)

Salary scale SO1 £26,277 pa pro rata

21 hours per week

- To consult disabled people locally
- To equip disabled people with self advocacy skill
- To produce reports and feedback on issues raised

Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator (Ref LL/04)

(This Post is for a disabled person)

Salary scale SO1 £26,277 pa pro rata

21 hours per week

- To facilitate the inclusion of disabled people in mainstream classes and courses
- To support providers through the process of improving their access
- To organise courses within ADKC

ADKC's offices are fully accessible. For an application pack, please call 020 8960 8863 and leave the job reference number you are interested in and your details clearly or Email adkc@adkc.org.uk

Application packs available in all formats. Closing date Friday 17th February 2006. Interview dates w/b 27th February and 6 March.

Leonard Cheshire (www.leonard-cheshire.org.uk) exists to serve disabled people around the world. It has been supporting disabled people for almost 60 years and in 55 countries. The charity supports over 21,000 disabled people in the UK.

Central London (home-based working may be possible)

Campaigns Co-ordinator

circa £25,000 per annum starting salary

An exciting opportunity has arisen for an enthusiastic individual to join Leonard Cheshire's Policy and Campaigns Team and play a leading role in the development and delivery of its local and national campaigning strategy. Reporting directly to the Policy and Campaigns Manager the successful candidate will be responsible for co-ordinating the team's campaigning programme across the UK.

The successful candidate will be committed to working with disabled people to campaign to change attitudes in society and secure disabled people's civil rights. The post holder will be a self-confident worker with lots of ideas and at least two years experience working on political or campaigning projects. Leonard Cheshire actively encourages applications from disabled people, and disabled candidates are guaranteed an interview if they meet the minimum essential criteria for the post.

Application packs can be downloaded from the website at www.leonard-cheshire.org or email: recruit@lc-uk.org or telephone 020 7802 8295.

Closing date for applications: Friday 10 February 2006

Interviews will be conducted on Friday 24 February 2006

We welcome applications from disabled people for all suitable vacancies. All vacancies are subject to standard or enhanced disclosure.



Creating opportunities with disabled people
LEONARD CHESHIRE

scope

employment service

Being disabled should create no barriers, so if you possess the skills and experience sought by numerous employers throughout the UK, we're keen to help you find the job that's right for you through our network of employment partners.

Working on behalf of a number of employers throughout the UK who see the skills you can offer as a genuine asset to their organisation, we have the following exciting career opportunities for disabled people keen to live an independent life and reach their potential:

Call Centre Opportunities

Retail Industry – Leicester (On-going)

Health Insurance – Tunbridge Wells (On-going)

Financial – Brighton, Andover, Southend, Leeds - (April)

Education Sector – Manchester (March)

Skills Required

Strong customer focus, good communication (both written and verbal), Computer literacy

Other Opportunities Available

Hotel based opportunities in Manchester, Birmingham and Brighton

Pharmacist vacancies – nationwide – Salaries from £25 - £42k

We have a variety of opportunities available, so if you are interested in these positions or would like to see if we can help you find employment in any other area or sector, please send us your C.V. outlining your aspirations.

Our partners have opportunities at various levels and can also offer both full and part time permanent employment with competitive packages.

To be considered, regardless of your disability, please send your CV and covering letter via email, including details of the geographical location which interests you, your salary expectations, plus details of your disability and how you have overcome any challenges in the workplace, to: employment.support@scope.org.uk or tel: 01480 309 615

Scope's Employment Service is involved in assisting disabled people into and remaining in work. When applying to us please indicate clearly whether you are currently in work, unemployed and seeking work, or in work but in current danger of losing your job due to your disability. We will discuss this with you further on receipt of your application. To find out more about the services we provide, visit our website: www.scope.org.uk/work

For disabled people achieving equality

• Recruitment (on page 43 to 46)



Make every caller mobile.

Dial-a-Ride Reservation Team - £18,000 pro rata
Bermondsey, SE London
Full & part-time opportunities

For some, our door-to-door Dial-a-Ride service is nothing short of a miracle. Whether it's a trip to the shops or a visit to the doctors, an afternoon in the park or tea with a friend, the service takes people who can't use mainstream public transport exactly where they want to go. It allows those who've enjoyed London all their lives to enjoy it still, a fact you'll soon find out once they've rung you to arrange a trip. Taking bookings and handling queries, you'll see how much a friendly voice and timely arrangement means to our customers, as you give them access to the whole of London and a social, energetic life.

A good knowledge of London would be useful, but it's more important that you have some customer service experience, especially as you'll speak with the occasional fragile customer. That way, you'll know who to cheer up, and when to move on to the next call, so that everyone is satisfied with our service. In return, we offer flexible hours - we're open 8am-9pm seven days a week. And best of all, you'll enjoy enriching lives right across the capital. To apply, please visit www.tfl.gov.uk or call 020 7027 1267. Please quote ref TfL1531. Closing date: 10th February 2006.

We want to be as diverse as the city we represent and welcome applications from everyone regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, faith or disability.

MAYOR OF LONDON



Transport for London



The Vassall Centre

The Vassall Centre Trust, The Vassall Centre
 Gill Avenue, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 2QQ.

Centre Manager

£30-33k pro rata
3-days p.w.

To run and manage this pioneering Centre that provides workspace for voluntary/community organisations and enterprises
 "without the barriers that disable people"

A demanding job that needs excellent management and business skills to run and develop the Centre and to promote its message of equality for disabled people at work. Disabled people are especially invited to apply.

Tel. 0117 965 9630

access@vassallcentre.org

Closing date 13.02.06



BritishRedCross

Centre Manager

Salary: £25,000 pa Location: Gorleston (Initially based at Norwich)
 35 hours per week

The Norfolk Coastal Centre for Independent Life, based in Gorleston, will provide advice and assistance to people with disabilities in Norfolk and the Waveney area of Suffolk in order to enable them as far as possible to achieve independent living.

This is a unique partnership between Red Cross and Norfolk County Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, Great Yarmouth Primary Care Trust, Job Centre Plus, Wheelchair Services.

We are looking to recruit a Centre Manager to implement the strategic direction of the services within this new centre in partnership with the stakeholders. Key responsibilities will include:- leading a team responsible for managing the centre, supporting volunteering opportunities at the centre; managing the delivery of services; and being at the forefront of developments in the field of supporting people with disabilities within Norfolk and the Waveney area and to ensure that the centre is run effectively, safely and efficiently and in response to local needs.

The Centre Manager will report directly to the Red Cross Operations Director - East Anglia.

For more information and an application pack please contact Rebecca Marshall on 01234 361062 or email RMarshall@redcross.org.uk clearly quoting reference SET433. **Closing date for receipt of completed application forms is 10th February 2006.**

As part of the recruitment and selection procedures the British Red Cross undertakes criminal record checking of all individuals who regularly work with or have access to children and vulnerable adults.

We are committed to welcoming people from the widest possible diversity of background, culture and experience.

We also need volunteers. See www.redcross.org.uk/volunteering

DEADLINE

DN Extra
February 2006
published 11 February.
Classified deadlines:
Booking and copy:
1 February.

Disability Now
March 2006 published
25 February.
Classified deadlines:
Booking: 10 February.
Copy: 14 February.

• Services

NEWSFLASH

Enable Enterprises' Select now sells disposable and reusable swimming pants for children, teens and adults who require additional protection under swimwear or wetsuits in a pool or while doing watersports.



Come and visit our online shop.
www.enableenterprises.com/select
0800 358 8484



BIRKDALE PAEDIATRIC & ADULT NEURO CLINIC

Advice and treatment from newborn babies to adults. A wide range of conditions treated, some of these include movement, posture, balance, walking, coordination, hand-function and learning difficulties. Specialise in cerebral palsy and neurological conditions. Farshideh Bondarenko DIP PHYSIO MCSP SRP.

web: www.neuro-physio.co.uk tel: 0208 998 9403

Make your next role as important as ours.

DFID, the Department for International Development: leading the British government's fight against world poverty.

We offer opportunities in our headquarters in London and East Kilbride - but also in many developing countries, with staff based in DFID offices plus British Embassies and High Commissions around the world. We have roles for leaders; professionals; specialists; managers; graduates and administrators.

DFID is an equal opportunities employer. Applications are welcomed from all parts of the community and we actively encourage interest from women, ethnic minority groups and those with a disability. Selection is on merit. Candidates should be UK Nationals, nationals of a member state of the European Economic Area (EEA) or Commonwealth citizens with the right to work in the UK.

You can find out more about us, and our work, on our website www.dfid.gov.uk. You'll also find information about specific vacancies, opportunities, and an electronic application on the site.



DFID

Department for
 International
 Development

www.dfid.gov.uk

CONDITIONS – Disability Now maintains the right to amend or withdraw lineage adverts without prior notice. All adverts must comply with the British Code of Advertising Practice.

Telephone numbers and addresses will not be placed in personal adverts, for confidentiality. Instead, Box numbers will be provided. Likewise, telephone numbers and addresses will not be given out over the telephone if requested.

Box Numbers can be requested for non-personal adverts. However, it may limit the response to it. If you want to advertise documents, goods or services contact Patrick Durham-Matthews tel: 020 7619 7320, fax: 020 7619 7331.

Lineage adverts can only be used by private individuals. All commercial enquiries must be addressed to Richard Gresham (see contact details above).

DN cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage of adverts or letters during forwarding. It is the responsibility of the advertiser to check the content of their advert, and to ensure any abbreviations cannot be misunderstood.

Support for disabled people

If you have a disability or health condition that affects your chances of finding or keeping a job, ask to see a Disability Employment Adviser. Disability Employment Advisers are based in Jobcentre Plus offices and Jobcentres and offer a wide range of advice and support. They can help you find a job, or stay in work if you are already employed.

The specialist service that Disability Employment Advisers provide, includes:

- advice on finding and keeping a job
- support with benefit entitlement and programmes like New Deal, and
- advice to employers on employing disabled people.

Find out what additional help you can get by visiting our website.

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Jobseeker Direct: 0845 6060 234

Textphone: 0845 6055 255



Including Jobcentres and social security offices



Kids is a national charity working with disabled children, young people and their families. We deliver a wide range of services, including leisure and advocacy projects with young people, and provide training and advice to promote inclusive play and leisure.

A NATIONAL VOICE FOR DISABLED YOUNG PEOPLE ON THEIR INCLUSION IN RECREATION AND LEISURE

YOUNG PEOPLE'S INCLUSION NETWORK: NATIONAL TEAM

Kids has received 3-year funding under the Big Lottery Young People's Fund for this exciting new project with disabled young people around England. The national team will work with Kids projects in five regions to set up new youth groups, who will assess favourite leisure activities and establish a national on-line network to devise and promote advice on inclusive leisure.

Communications Manager (ref: YP 02/06): £25,706 pa (inc London weighting)

With writing and copy editing skills, extensive web experience and knowledge of assistive technologies, you will support disabled young people and work with our ICT partners to create virtual YP-in communities and sites.

Admin and Finance worker (ref: YP03/06): £18,990 pa (inc London weighting)

Highly efficient and numerate administrator, with good communication skills, experience of progress chasing, meeting tight deadlines and processing financial information. Excellent IT skills.

London-based, these are both full time posts

CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS: 15 February 2006

Assessment and Interviews will be held in London w/c 20 February 2006

Regional Network Development Officers:

Based at a Kids regional centre, your excellent communication skills will support you in establishing and facilitating the region's Young People's Inclusion Network group. You will have experience of youth advocacy and development work, of group facilitation and consultation with young people. Efficient in programme implementation and monitoring, you have worked with disabled young people and have a high level of disability awareness. These are full time posts.

Development Officer, London (ref: YP04/06): £27,050 pa (inc London weighting)

Development Officer, Yorks & Humber (Hull) (ref: YP05/06): £24,260 pa

Development Officer, West Midlands (Birmingham) (ref: YP06/06): £24,260 pa

Development Officer, South West (Bristol) (ref: YP07/06): £24,260 pa

Development Officer, South East (Fareham) (ref: YP08/06): £24,260 pa

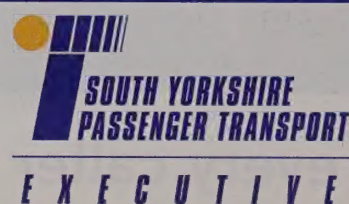
CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS: 20 February 2006

Assessment and Interviews will be held in each region early March

To receive full details and an application pack please email: yp-in@kids.org.uk

QUOTING THE APPROPRIATE REF. No, or send a large SAE to: YP-in, Kids, 6 Aztec Row, Berners Road, London N1 0PW. (Please state preferred format).

Kids strives to be an equal opportunities employer. All disabled people who meet the person specification will be offered an interview.



COMMITTED TO EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT

Working in partnership with the four South Yorkshire District Councils of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, local public transport operators and many South Yorkshire organisations, the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive is responsible for securing and promoting the best possible public transport network for the South Yorkshire community.

Through our commitment to providing equal opportunities we intend to be an organisation that embraces and encourages diversity and is positive about employing disabled people.

All vacancies are advertised on our website at: www.sypte.co.uk and within local newspapers, alternatively you can call the Human Resources Department on 0114 2211218 for information.

Benefits include a flexible working hours scheme, 26 days holiday per year, a company final salary based pension scheme and a free countywide TravelMaster providing unlimited bus, tram and rail travel throughout South Yorkshire.



Awarded for excellence



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Centre of Excellence



The Transport Executive is striving to become an exemplar Equality and Diversity Employer

SEND US YOUR SMALLS...

...and make a big impression. Small ads in DN reach over 60,000 people for just £9 a line. All small ads must be paid for in advance. If you want to advertise, please use the form provided. Send it with a cheque for the total to Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW.

PERSONAL ADS

For personal ads, submit about 25 words and send a cheque or postal order for £10 payable to *Disability Now* with your ad. This is to help cover our costs.

'Making a Positive Difference to the lives of Detained Patients'

The Mental Health Act Commission

Ref: NAT197

The Mental Health Act Commission is a Special Health Authority, established under the Mental Health Act 1983 to monitor the operation of the Act as it relates to detained patients.

The Commission is seeking to appoint 12 Commissioners to work within specific geographical areas. In addition there is a vacancy for a non executive board member with an accountancy qualification.

Board meetings are held at the Commission's Nottingham headquarters monthly, alternating formal and informal meetings.

The commission seeks at all times to ensure representation from all sections of the community.

For full details of all posts please visit the Mental Health Act Commission's website www.mhac.org.uk or the NHS Appointments Commission website www.appointments.org.uk/vacancies

The closing date for applications is 10th February 2006.



MURDERBALL DVD



Murderball, which was in cinemas in November (DN, November 2005) is released on DVD this month. Optimum Home Entertainment is giving away 20 copies of the DVD, worth £19.99 each.

Murderball is the original name given to the sport now known as quad rugby. This award-winning documentary focuses on the intense rivalry between two quadriplegic rugby teams, Team USA and Team Canada, culminating in a nail-biting match at the 2004 Paralympics in Athens. It is a rollercoaster ride of larger-than-life personalities, fierce rivalry, athletic prowess and triumph over overwhelming odds.

Extras on the DVD include a behind-the-scenes look at the game, deleted scenes and interviews.

For your chance to win a copy, tick 'DVD' in the entry form.

To find out more, tel: 020 7307 7190,
www.optimumdvdstore.com

HANDY HELP IN THE KITCHEN

Be safer while cooking with a Buckingham Coolhand, a new kitchen aid from Nottingham Rehab Supplies, who are giving away ten Coolhands, worth £6.99 each. The gadget helps to avoid burnt fingers when removing hot plates from the microwave or oven.

The light, strong Coolhand simply grips and releases plates as easily as using your hand. It has a non-slip soft grip and is ideal for those with arthritis and limited hand dexterity. It uses the power of leverage so that the entire hand takes the weight of the plate instead of just the wrist.

For your chance to win a Buckingham Coolhand, tick 'Coolhand' in the entry form.

For more information on the range of products from Nottingham Rehab Supplies, tel: 0845 121 8111, www.nrs-uk.co.uk



DN next month

All the best news, views, jobs and offers. On sale 28 February

BENEFITS BREAKDOWN

Disability Alliance looks at the government's annual increase in benefits and what it could mean for you

ACCIDENT ALERT

Helen Smith tells readers how to deal with a road traffic accident after emergency services overreacted to a minor incident

KEY COMMENTS

Our new columnists continue, with Simone Aspis and Danny Crates adding their contributions

LAST MONTH'S WINNERS

The winner of the gift box in the December issue was S.Eames from East Sussex.

The winners of the Simply Practical Clothing were M.Lowther from Gwynedd, K.Symington from Edinburgh and G.Watt from Sunderland.

The winners of the Biofreeze were J.Tanswell from Hereford, J.Dodd from Birmingham, G.Hobson from North Devon, O.Pollitt from Cheshire, E.Dixon from Redditch, M.Zareian from Wiltshire, V.N.Kelly from Doncaster, L.Bowman from Orkney, R.J.Downton from Stafford, D.Naughton from Essex, M.P.Moynihan from York and E.Day from Leicester.

to enter

Tick the competition circle below, add your details, and send for FREE to Disability Now, Freepost WD4323, London N7 9BR, or you can fax it on 020 7619 7331, or email the details to: fiona.mitchell@scope.org.uk

DVD ☐ Coolhand ☐ Atlas ☐



terms & conditions

Closing date for entrants: 17.02.06 • Entrants must be over 18 • No proof of purchase required • UK entrants only • No cash alternatives • Winners notified by post • Editor's decision is final • Special offers not open to DN staff or associates • Winners may be announced in DN • In association with Optimum Home Entertainment, Nottingham Rehab Supplies and Gowrings Mobility. We may use your name and address for further marketing purposes. Please tick the box if you do not wish your details to be included ☐

GOWRINGS MOBILITY UK ATLAS

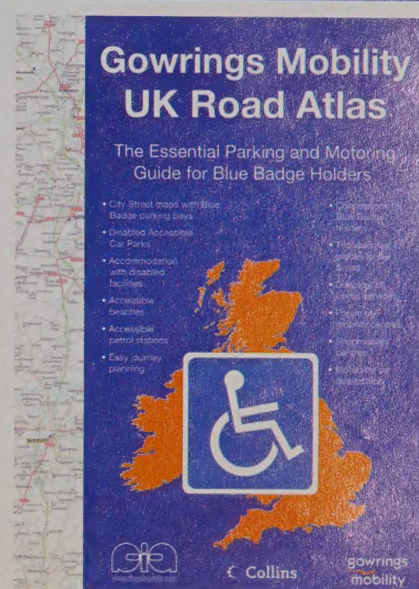
Gowrings Mobility is giving away ten copies of its UK Road Atlas, worth £12.99 each. The atlas includes street mapping of 65 city centres detailing all the parking options and facilities for Blue Badge holders. There is information on accessible car parks, petrol stations, beaches, toilets, accommodation and Shopmobility locations

The atlas, which is published by the Public Information Exchange (PIE) Guide, has been developed through extensive on-the-ground research, backed up with support and information from local and district councils across the country, car park owners, petrol station companies, and businesses that cater specifically for disabled and older people, as well as associations such as the Disabled Drivers' Association and the Blue Badge Network.

The atlas contains a foreword from Paralympic athlete and gold medallist Dame Tanni Grey Thompson.

For your chance to win a copy, tick 'Atlas' in the entry form.

For more information, contact Gowrings Mobility, tel: Lo-Call 0845 608 8020, www.gowringsmobility.co.uk



Jubilee mobility
0121 502 2252

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MERCEDES BENZ Vaneo LIBERTY

Wheelchair accessible luxury MPV

It's quite simply in a class of it's own.

A genuine luxury MPV from Mercedes Benz with unparalleled access for wheelchair users at a truly remarkable price.

With almost 60 inches of headroom, Jubilee's superb lowered floor adaptations both complement and accentuate the stylish Vaneo package, setting new industry standards for both design and simple practicality.

... and 4 seats come as standard.



Superbly engineered by Jubilee for just

£18,995

on the road, fully adapted



best value
luxury MPV
ever

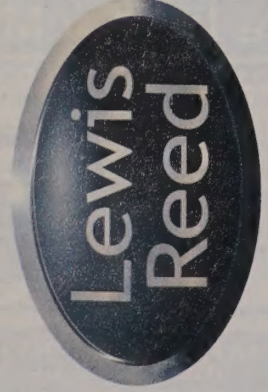


£1.80 February 2006

This man walked free after killing his disabled son

Why did he escape jail?

Now available on
Motability 5 year lease



Different by Design



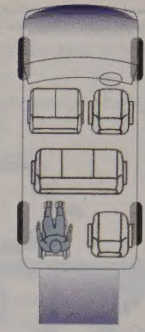
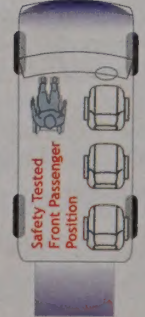
VW T5 Cruiser MkII
Spacious affordable family transport, with up to 7 safety tested M1 seats, safety tested wheelchair and occupant restraints & safety tested lightweight rear access ramp.



VW Shuttle SE
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Top of the range vehicle with 2.5TDI engine up to 7 safety tested M1 seats, safety tested wheelchair and occupant restraints & safety tested lightweight rear access ramp.



Renault Kangoo
From £13,295.00 OTR*

TorSpring

Citroen Dispatch
Now with TorSpring Ramp
From £13,995.00 OTR*

TorSpring

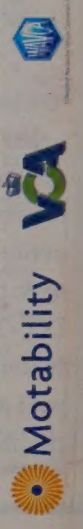
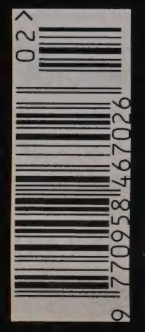
Citroen Berlingo
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Flexi-seat® seating system
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New Citroen Berlingo 1.9D with Metallic Paint was £13,595.00 now £11,950.00* Save £1,645.00 Limited stock only 4 available	£8,950.00*
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VW T5 Transporter 1.9TDi 01/03/04 Silver	

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*Model shown have feature only available as optional extra.
OTR prices assume zero rated VAT & RFL exempt.
All prices correct at time of going to print. Vehicles subject to availability.

ALL LOVED UP
Valentine's dos and don'ts

